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# *Passive Obedience* and Berkeley's Moral Philosophy

Matti Häyry

**Abstract:** In *Passive Obedience* Berkeley argues that we must always observe the prohibitions decreed by our sovereign rulers. He defends this thesis both by providing critiques against opposing views and, more interestingly, by presenting a moral theory that supports it. The theory contains elements of divine-command, natural-law, moral-sense, rule-based, and outcome-oriented ethics. Ultimately, however, it seems to rest on a notion of spiritual reason—a specific God-given faculty that all rational human beings have. Berkeley's work on immaterialism, for which he is better known, could thus perhaps best be seen as an attempt to find a scientific justification for his moral doctrine.

## I. A Key to Berkeley's Moral Philosophy?

*Passive Obedience*, a treatise first delivered in three sermons to students at Trinity College, Dublin and published in 1712 as a book, is one of the main sources of knowledge concerning Berkeley's moral philosophy.<sup>1</sup> However, since the main point of the book is political—Berkeley defends a duty never to actively resist established authority—the text has given rise to diverse readings of the ethical views underlying it.

During the twentieth century, many commentators held that Berkeley's moral theory can be associated with theological utilitarianism, a doctrine according to which we have a duty to promote the good of humanity because God, our universally benevolent creator, wants us to do so.<sup>2</sup> Others, while recognizing this tendency, have emphasized a variety of further elements in Berkeley's ethical thinking: divine command and natural law considerations; rational self-love and ethical egoism; opposition to materialism, skepticism, and naturalism; and leanings towards or against Jacobitism.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See George Berkeley, "Passive Obedience; or, the Christian Doctrine of Not Resisting the Supreme Power, Proved and Vindicated, Upon the Principles of the Law of Nature, in a Discourse Delivered at the College-Chapel [1712]," in *The Works of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne*, vol. 6, eds. A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1948). Numbers in square brackets in the text refer to the chapters of this edition.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Ernest Albee, *A History of English Utilitarianism* (New York: Macmillan, 1902); Ian D. S. Ward, "George Berkeley: Precursor of Keynes or Moral Economist on Underdevelopment?" *Journal of Political Economy* 67 (1959), 31-40; Paul J. Olscamp, *The Moral Philosophy of George Berkeley* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970); Richard B. Brandt, *A Theory of the Good and the Right* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979); Geoffrey Warnock, "Berkeley's Moral Philosophy," *Journal of Medical Ethics* 16 (1990), 48-50; David Berman, "The Jacobitism of Berkeley's 'Passive Obedience'," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 47 (1986), 309-319; David Berman, *George Berkeley: Idealism and the Man* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994); Matti Häyry, *Liberal Utilitarianism and Applied Ethics* (London: Routledge, 1994); Matti Häyry and Heta Häyry, "Obedience to Rules and Berkeley's Theological Utilitarianism," *Utilitas* 6 (1994), 232-42.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, T. E. Jessop, editor's introduction to *Passive Obedience*, in W 6; C. D. Broad, "Berkeley's theory of morals," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 23/24 (1953), 72-86; Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1959); David Berman, "The

In what follows, I will describe the argument put forward in *Passive Obedience* and then outline the ethical ideas that it employs and evokes. The description proceeds in three stages. I will first show how Berkeley explicates his thesis, second how he thinks it can be proven, and third how he defends his chosen position.

## II. The Explication of the Thesis

Berkeley sets out to explain and defend the following scriptural thesis:

*Whosoever resisteth the Power, resisteth the Ordinance of God.* (Romans 13:2)

Berkeley explicates the thesis in the following way. Contrary to the teachings of “some very rational and learned men” [2]—(Hugo Grotius and Samuel Pufendorf are mentioned by name [51]; John Locke also springs to mind)—we have an unqualified and unlimited moral duty of *passive obedience* to the supreme civil power of the land [3]. By “passive obedience” Berkeley means that we must either abstain from doing what the laws of the land prohibit, or we must patiently and without resistance suffer the punishment if we act against the law and get caught [3]. It does *not* mean that we should always actively do what the law requires us to do since this “active obedience” could prompt us to act against the laws of nature—which trump the positive laws of the land in conflict situations [26]. Passive obedience does not have this effect, because according to Berkeley, we cannot go against the laws of nature by doing nothing. Instead, we can observe all prohibitions simultaneously by not acting at all [26]. (Of course, if we refuse to act in ways that the law of the land defines, we must still suffer the set punishment without resistance.)

So we have a moral duty to observe the positive precepts (commands) of the law *as long as* they are not in conflict with the laws of nature; *and* (this is the actual thesis) a moral duty to observe the negative precepts (prohibitions) of the law, including the duty not to resist the execution of punishment, always, completely, and without exceptions.

But to whom exactly do we owe these duties? Berkeley does not specify, once and for all, the proper locus of the highest power in different societies. Instead, he contends more generally that “there is an absolute unlimited non-resistance or passive obedience due to the supreme civil power, wherever placed in any nation” [2]. He notes that it is normally clear where the supreme power is placed—usually in the hands of the uncontested legal rulers of the land—but in the course of the book he makes some exceptions which he prefers to call “specifications” to the definition of the thesis. We do not owe duties to

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Jacobitism of Berkeley’s *Passive Obedience*,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 47 (1986), 309-319; Warnock 1990; Stephen Darwall, “Berkeley’s Moral and Political Philosophy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Berkeley*, ed. Kenneth Winkler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 311-38; Roomet Jakapi, “Was Berkeley a utilitarian?” in *Human Nature as the Basis of Morality and Society in Early Modern Philosophy*, eds. Juhana Lemetti and Eva Piirimäe (Helsinki: Philosophy Society of Finland, 2007), 51-68; Scott Breuninger, “Rationality and Revolution: Rereading Berkeley’s Sermons on Passive Obedience,” *New Hibernia Review* 12 (2008), 63-86; Daniel Flage, “Was Berkeley an Ethical Egoist?” *Berkeley Studies* 19 (2008), 3-18.

“usurpers or even madmen” [52]. And if it is genuinely unclear whether the supreme power rightfully belongs to this or that competing party, reasonable people are allowed to use their discretion in choosing their sides. But once the side has been chosen, absolute passive obedience is again owed to the chosen party [54]. So the claim Berkeley’s evidence eventually supports is that we should never do what our (reasonably rightful) rulers forbid us to do. Nonetheless, the claim that he professes to defend remains the strict version without qualifications.

### III. The Proof of the Thesis

Although the thesis is a fragment of the Christian doctrine, its proof and defense in Berkeley’s sermon are not based on scripture but, as declared in the title, on the “law of nature” that can be grasped by “the principles of reason common to all mankind” [2]. The proof is by and large presented in the first part of the discourse [4–32]. It is, in essence, deductive and proceeds in the following steps.

It “is a truth evident by the light of nature, that there is a sovereign omniscient spirit,” God, who “alone is the maker and preserver of all things” [6]; who is wise, good, and just [41–42]; who “alone can make us for ever happy, or for ever miserable” [6]; whose end of action is “the general well-being of all men” [7]; who has, to this end, designed laws of nature both for natural events and for human behavior [7]; and who has “appointed a day of retribution in another life” to secure eternal glory for those (and only for those) who observe the laws of nature in this life—which is the greatest human good and happiness [42, 5]. Human beings have two good reasons to aim to live by the laws of nature designed by God. As the sovereign provider of our eternal happiness and misery, God is the one we should please by our actions in order to guarantee our own long-term well-being [6, 42]. Also, as our creator, God is “with the most undoubted right the great legislator of the world; and mankind are by all the ties of duty, no less than interest, bound to obey his laws” [6].

Since God’s aim in designing the laws of nature is the well-being of humankind, these laws could, in theory, be observed either by trying to promote humanity’s well-being by each separate individual act and omission that we choose [8] or by following a set [15] of laws which, “if universally practiced,” would have “an essential fitness to procure the well-being of mankind” [8]. Of these two approaches, the first one, according to Berkeley, fails on two accounts. Empirically, our imperfect judgment and limited knowledge render most of our individual decisions wrong [9]. And conceptually, to grant that everyone’s every assessment has equal merit would eliminate the possibility of universally shared (or even personally held, fixed) substantive moral norms, and hence morality [9]. Subsequently, Berkeley advocates the second approach [10].

The laws which, if universally practiced, would have an essential fitness to procure the well-being of humankind can be discovered by right reason [12]. They are “called *laws of nature*, because they are universal, and do not derive their obligation from any civil sanction, but immediately from the Author of nature himself” [12]. They are “said to be *stamped on the mind*, to be *engraven on the tables of the heart*, because they are well

known to mankind, and suggested and inculcated by conscience” [12]. They are also “termed *eternal rules of reason*, because they necessarily result from the nature of things, and may be demonstrated by the infallible deductions of reason” [12]. Those laws of nature include duties never to resist the supreme power [15], lie under oath [15, 25], commit adultery [15, 25], steal [15, 25], commit murder [32], or do evil so that good may come of it [35]. Whatever else Berkeley had in mind, this list records every universal moral law mentioned in the work.

As for the duty never to resist the supreme power—the duty of passive obedience—right reason puts it forward as a law of nature because it is the only thing that stands between us and total disorder. The wisdom and power of individuals is seriously limited, and the wills of individuals are in constant conflict. So if individual wills are not “combined together, under the direction . . . of one and the same will . . . the law of the society,” a state of anarchy will prevail. In this state, “there is no politeness, no order, no peace, among men, but the world is one great heap of misery and confusion.” If, on the other hand, individual wills are subjected to one will, anarchy will give way to a “state . . . as a reasonable creature.” Such a state, with its system of laws, has “a greater reflection and foresight of miseries” than individuals could have, which is why it promotes the well-being of its subjects better than anarchy. These considerations demonstrate that unconditional submission to the supreme power fulfills the criterion of a “law of nature”—if always absolutely observed by everyone everywhere, the laws of any society keep anarchy at bay and prevent the chaos and misery associated with it [16].

Although passive obedience is suggested to right reason as a reducer of misery and promoter of well-being, it is not, according to Berkeley, a law of nature *because* it promotes the good of humanity (or because it is suggested by conscience) [31]. It is a law of nature “because it is decreed by the will of God, which alone can give the sanction of a *law of nature* to any precept” [31]. It follows that passive obedience—or any other law of nature—does not cease to be valid if it, in particular cases, happens to contribute to bad outcomes or seems to go against our sentiments or conscience [31]. Misery may occur as an accidental consequence when right rules are observed by the virtuous, but they flow from “the unhappy concurrence of events” or “the wickedness of perverse men, who will not conform to them” [13]. Cases in which this happens, although potentially numerous, do not dent the validity of laws of nature—whose universal observance would, as its necessary consequence, have promoted human well-being [46].

Not everyone believes that the duty to obey the supreme power could or should be absolute and unconditional; but there are, Berkeley argues, good reasons for thinking that it is. The well-being of humanity requires shared rules, but no such rules would exist if people could decide for themselves when to respect the limits set by the state and when to ignore them [27]. Besides, even God does not suspend the laws of nature just because their existence leads to bad things. Berkeley’s example is a good ruler who falls off a cliff, dies, and leaves the nation in trouble: no divine intervention is normally forthcoming. So, imitating God, neither should we deviate from the rules set by political authorities to promote good in the short term [27]. And although unconditional obedience

may seem detrimental to ourselves, our friends, or our country, we have to abandon those perspectives and look at things as “distant spectators” [28].

When we assume the viewpoint of the distant spectator, we realize the error of certain popular criticisms. Some might observe that, even within the outlined model, people still need to decide for themselves that laws of nature exist, that they can be found in certain ways, and that certain rules belong to this category. Berkeley’s response to this is that since the judgments of neutral, distant observers converge, relativism and chaos do not ensue from the introduction of the human element [29]. Others could argue that since ends are more important than means, obedience to the state should be moderated by the well-being of humanity [30]. Berkeley’s answer is that while ends are indeed paramount, the ultimate end of human life is to act according to God’s decrees, not to promote well-being [31]. Besides, he adds, all moralists agree that evil should not be committed so that good may come of it [35]. Yet others can note that even laws of nature must admit exceptions, since otherwise, for instance, the rule “Thou shalt not kill” would ban warfare and self-defense, which would be untenable. But Berkeley comments that this is just a matter of choosing language more carefully. Once properly specified as “Thou shalt not murder,” the rule does not have to admit any exceptions [32].

To summarize, then, Berkeley’s proof of his thesis is that:

- We have a prudential and a moral obligation to observe the laws of nature designed by God.
- The laws of nature are a set of rules that, if absolutely observed by all people in all times and all places, would secure the general well-being of humanity.
- The laws of nature are known to us by conscience and they can be demonstrated by right reason.
- Right reason tells us that the absolute duty not to resist the supreme power (passive obedience) is one of the laws of nature. Q.E.D.

#### IV. The Defense of the Thesis

In the second and third parts of the discourse, Berkeley defends his thesis against competing views [33–40] and objections based on the alleged evil consequences of passive obedience [41–52].

##### *a. Arguments that disobedience must sometimes be justifiable*

Berkeley presents and promptly rejects six objections claiming that there must be at least some circumstances in which defiance of prohibitions should be preferred to blind submission. One argument against unquestioned obedience is that self-preservation is the first law of nature. When the supreme power threatens our lives, we have a duty to resist it. Berkeley’s answer to this is that the term “law of nature” has two meanings. It can denote, prescriptively, “a rule or precept for the direction of the voluntary actions of reasonable agents”; or it can designate, descriptively, “any general rule, which we observe to obtain in the works of nature.” Since only laws in the first sense imply duties

and since self-preservation is a law of nature only in the second sense, the objection collapses [33].

Another critical consideration is that the public good of the nation might genuinely require resistance and rebellion. Unless corrupt power is overthrown, society can in some cases be damaged beyond repair. Berkeley's reply is that non-resistance is nonetheless an absolute moral duty. And since absolute moral duties cannot be limited by considerations of well-being (or of any other end of action), this view must be incorrect [36].

Many scholars in Berkeley's time believed that all political authority is derived from individuals, yet individuals do not have sovereignty over themselves. Political power comes from human beings but power over human beings is ultimately in God's hands. The supreme secular power cannot have an absolute right over individuals, because individuals cannot, logically, transfer to anyone what is not theirs in the first place. Berkeley agrees with this partly. The supreme power would be wrong to assume an absolute right over individuals and to dispense with people at will; and it follows from this that subjects would not wrong the ruler by resistance. But they would still violate the moral law of passive obedience, which is why they must suffer patiently the actions of the supreme ruler [37].

A popular objection against absolute compliance to political authority is that unconditional obedience would deprive citizens of their natural freedom and thus enslave them. Berkeley counters this by reminding us that, to make any sense of social life, our appetites must be "chained and fettered by the laws of nature and reason" anyway, and that this, in fact, "addeth much to the dignity of that which is peculiarly human in our composition." Therefore, appeals to slavery are alarmist exaggeration [38].

Focusing on the weaknesses of those in power, opponents can point out that it would surely be wrong to compel subjects to endure "insolence and oppression of one or more of the magistrates, armed with the supreme civil power," as this would mean pleading loyalty to tyrants. But Berkeley's defense is that the loyalty pleaded is not to tyrants, who "for their own sakes have not the least right to our obedience." What we must obey, instead, are "the laws of God and nature," and calamities only make our obedience more noble and meritorious [39].

A final call for exceptions notes that commands can, in Berkeley's view, be disobeyed if need be and asks why prohibitions should be treated differently. The answer in *Passive Obedience* is that the distinction and its normative basis are clear. By actively doing things we can violate the laws of nature, and this is why we must have discretion over obeying active commands. But by doing nothing we do not transgress the natural order, and hence prohibitions can be absolute—they can all be obeyed simultaneously [40].

#### *b. Objections based on the alleged evil consequences of absolute obedience*

Berkeley goes on to consider seven arguments claiming that blind compliance leads to such horrific outcomes that it cannot be reasonably recommended. To start with,



opponents say, if passive obedience is God's law, then God exposes, on many occasions, innocent people to "the greatest suffering and hardships without any remedy," and this has to be inconsistent with divine wisdom and goodness—that God should by definition have. Here Berkeley contends that we have to "distinguish between the necessary and accidental consequences of a moral law." The consequences of a complete set of moral laws are *necessary* only if they occur when all the laws in the set are universally and absolutely observed. If these are bad, then the laws are bad. But in all other cases the consequences of a complete set of moral laws are *accidental*, and they are then attributable to extrinsic events and the actions of weak and wicked human beings. Their badness does not have a bearing on the validity of the laws. Since the suffering and hardship referred to in the objection are accidental, they challenge the morality of people but not the wisdom and goodness of God [41].

Others claim that when the vicious break the laws of nature, the virtuous have to suffer, and that this must be inconsistent with divine wisdom and justice—another pair of God's attributes. Berkeley grants that this would be true, were it not that God has set a day of retribution in the afterlife. The virtuous will, on that day, be rewarded with the eternal glory of the righteous, which will amply compensate for their worldly misery [42].

According to a psychological objection, passive obedience encourages all rulers to become tyrants—and, in addition, makes the oppression of tyrants more intolerable by denying any possibility of fighting back [43]. But Berkeley sees the situation differently. Rulers are either good, in which case they do not become tyrants, or bad, in which case they will become tyrants anyway, so passive obedience does not change the situation either way. As for fighting back, Berkeley thinks that rebellion always comes with a price that is not worth paying. A weak rebellion will be crushed, causing misery. A strong rebellion might be crushed, causing misery. A strong rebellion might succeed and lead to the appointment of a bad government, causing continued misery. And a strong rebellion might succeed and lead to the appointment of a good government, but misery has been caused in the process. Besides, even if the torment is intolerable and the relief through rebellion certain, considerations of accidental consequences do not trump laws of nature—Berkeley remarks that although adultery could in some instances increase the well-being of those concerned, this does not make it right [43–46].

Critics can, at this point, ask Berkeley sarcastically whether we should just "then submit our necks to the sword" and have "no refuge, against extreme tyranny established by law?" But not so, according to the author of *Passive Obedience*, because it is, he believes, unlikely that rulers would actively and deliberately seek the misery of those they rule. And even if they did (or seemed to do), "subordinate magistrates . . . ought not, in obedience to those decrees, to act any thing contrary to the express laws of God." To preach that public officials should limit their executive actions in the light of the laws of God and nature would, Berkeley claims, be more advantageous to the peace and safety of nations than to preach active resistance against the supreme power [49].

It could, however, be against our personal freedom and dignity to have to submit blindly and implicitly to the decrees of other human beings, even if they were not intentionally

malevolent. Berkeley's response to this is that those who are not entitled to manage the affairs of the state are unlikely to be clever and neutral enough to contribute anything significant to legislation or morals to begin with. So it is necessary that they submit to someone else's rules, and this being the case, what could be wrong with the rules of those who hold the power? [50]

Grotius and Pufendorf—presumably two of the “very rational and learned men” cited in the beginning of the treatise [2]—had argued that obedience must be limited by the spirit and intention of the original contract among individuals who set up a government. Since enduring death in the hands of tyrants without resistance would render people worse off than they would have been in the state of nature, absolute loyalty to the supreme power cannot be reasonably expected. To Berkeley, however, this argument is faulty because it is based on a clearly perverted premise. To say that dying in the hands of the rulers would be worse than the state of nature would be to say that obedience is worse than anarchy. Since we already know that anarchy is always worse than passive obedience, the latter claim is false and the objection is invalid [51].

The last resort of the critics is that obedience without limitations would imply that we are “bound to submit without any opposition to usurpers, or even madmen, possessed of the supreme authority,” and this would be absurd. Berkeley concedes the point but does not see it as fatal to his view. Limitless obedience to usurpers or madmen would indeed be absurd and should not be considered a law of nature. But this is simply a specification to the phrasing of the law, not a limitation to our loyalty to the legitimate and sane supreme power [52].

## V. Two Peculiarities in Berkeley's Presentation

Berkeley defends passive obedience against counterarguments in a way that places considerable weight on his underlying moral theory. God has certain qualities from which we can deduce that we have a moral duty never to resist the supreme power. There are competing views saying that we may sometimes resist the supreme power, but they must be wrong because we have a moral duty never to resist the supreme power. And there are objections based on the alleged evil consequences of non-resistance, but they must be wrong because we have a moral duty never to resist the supreme power. Since opposing views are not rejected by independent arguments, it is imperative that the theological, ontological, epistemological, and moral ideas underlying Berkeley's defense are well grounded.

Berkeley also defends passive obedience in a peculiarly strict form. He seems to evoke, from time to time, qualifications that would soften the tone of the thesis, but their role is not fully explained in the text. These qualifications are that:

- We do not have to obey madmen. [52]
- We do not have to obey usurpers. [52]
- We do not have to obey the same supreme power as other rational individuals obey, if there are several equal claims to the highest authority. [54]

- We do not have to take traditional formulations of moral laws for granted: murder, not life taking, is absolutely prohibited. [32]
- We can normally assume that those in power do not act out of cruelty to their subjects or try to kill them at will. [49]

In the light of these exceptions, Berkeley could have defined the rule of passive obedience in terms that would have been easier to defend, for instance:

*Never disobey the prohibitions of reasonably sane and rightful rulers or their officers, or resist them in the execution of their rightful punitive duties, unless they try to take your life without good reason or otherwise act cruelly!*

The key to *Passive Obedience* and possibly to Berkeley's moral philosophy could be that, instead, he held on to, or at least never explicitly gave up in the treatise, the more categorical formulation. I will return to this point after considering the other features of his ethical view.

#### VI. Berkeley's Moral Theory in *Passive Obedience*

The moral theory underlying Berkeley's claim that we have a duty never to resist the supreme power has several different elements. These are summarized in 21<sup>st</sup> century terms in Table 1. The left-hand column provides a summary of the view underlying *Passive Obedience* and the right-hand column lists the ethical doctrines, theories, and isms that scholars have identified in the treatise.<sup>1</sup>

<i>We must obey God</i>	► Divine Command Theory
<i>because it is in our own best interest</i>	► Rational Egoism
<i>and because God is our creator;</i>	► Divine Command Theory?
<i>in the way that our conscience suggests</i>	► Not Moral Sense ► Spiritual Reason?
<i>and our natural reason can demonstrate;</i>	► Natural Law Theory
<i>i.e. by absolutely observing a set of rules</i>	► Non-Consequentialism, Deontology
<i>that would, if universally and absolutely observed, promote the general well-being of humanity.</i>	► (Theological) Rule Utilitarianism

Table 1: The elements of Berkeley's moral theory

<sup>1</sup> See notes 2 and 3 for references to the literature.

A potential point of confusion is that many of the listed theories and approaches can be seen as mutually incompatible. If divine commands are crucial, then reason and consequences cannot be decisive for morality. If natural reason is critical, then we cannot simultaneously hold that conscience and well-being are paramount. If rational (private) self-interest is what we aim at, then the general (public) good of humanity cannot be our goal of action (although private and public welfare came to be combined later on in the idea of the “invisible hand”). If the theory falls under the heading of non-consequentialism or deontology, it cannot be counted as a proper form of utilitarianism (if this is seen as a branch of consequentialism). And so on.

Most of these frictions can be explained away by assigning different tasks to different principles, as Berkeley in fact did. Absolute obedience to the proper set of rules is the *criterion of behavior* set by God—for God when it comes to natural laws and for us in the case of moral laws. It is an *attribute of God* as our benevolent creator that the proper set of rules aims at general human well-being. Our *moral reason* for observing the criterion ought to be that God is our creator. Our own eternal self-interest should be our *psychological motivation* for it. Natural reason is our most *neutral way of defining our duties*. And conscience can be a *shortcut or a checkpoint in defining these duties*.

As for utility and consequences, some historical and dogmatic points should be kept in mind. As a precursor of proper forms of utilitarianism, “theological utilitarianism” as held by Berkeley and others is not necessarily compatible with all versions of the more modern creed. It is a view that gained its name retrospectively because it contains, among other things, consequentialist aspects. Especially if “proper” forms of the doctrine are defined by the assessment of individual acts, “rule utilitarianism” cannot be a genuine form of utilitarianism in any of its forms. The dispute concerning Berkeley’s possible utilitarianism can be seen as mostly semantic, although many of the things he said in *Passive Obedience* have interesting affinities with later insights in British ethics.

Two points should be made about the principles listed in Table 1. First, it was apparently obvious to Berkeley that creatures must always obey their creators. This is, however, a difficult rule to comprehend in a secular context. Analogical cases could be provided by children and robots—both arguably duty-bound to their parents and makers. But the problem is that neither children nor robots are always morally expected to conform to all the rules (harmful and abhorrent ones are a case in point) that are invented by their biological and technological masters. The tenet’s deeper meaning is probably impossible to grasp without a thorough account of its metaphysical basis—which is not included in Berkeley’s treatise. Secondly, conscience is important to Berkeley, but in *Passive Obedience* he does not specify what he means by it. From his other works we can deduce that he did not mean a quasi-naturalized awareness of the right and the wrong, championed, for instance, by the moral-sense theorists of his time.<sup>2</sup> He seems to have meant, instead, some kind of “spiritual reason” that can be trusted even when natural or intellectual reason can only generate irresolvable disagreement.

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<sup>2</sup> See Olscamp, *Moral Philosophy*, 165 ff.

The role of conscience, like the duty to obey one's maker, creates a lingering tension. When private self-interest is conceptually excluded from the moral picture (as a prudential consideration) and the well-being of humanity is rejected as a source of moral guidance (as something that comes to play only indirectly, mediated by the God-given laws of nature), the remaining contenders for discovering our duties are divine commands, natural reason, and conscience. But divine commands, as stated in scriptures and church teaching, are inadmissible as evidence by Berkeley's own limitation of the discussion to natural reason at the outset of *Passive Obedience*. Natural reason, again by Berkeley's own admission, is divided on the matter. Many rational people (e.g. Grotius and Pufendorf) have thought that our obedience to the supreme power should be limited; and that human sociability rather than blind obedience gives a foundation to the moral laws of nature. This leaves conscience as Berkeley's last resort, but at least in *Passive Obedience* he does not give a satisfactory account of it. Somehow this faculty of "spiritual reason" should explain his disagreement with other scholars *and* his own greater moral acumen, and at the same time conform to his idea that his conclusions can be accepted by all reasonable people alike.

Despite the question marks left by Berkeley's treatise, it is relatively easy to formulate the moral theory underlying *Passive Obedience* and to outline its main practical implications. Let me express the view in a series of questions and answers. What is it that human beings morally ought to do? They ought to conform to God's will. What does God will? As our benevolent creator, God wills the good of humanity. How can we best conform to God's will? We can do this by observing the moral laws of nature. How can we acquire knowledge about the moral laws of nature? We can do this in the light of our reason and conscience. What are the rules that reason and conscience tell us to observe? They are traditional Christian prohibitions, including the prohibition against actively resisting the supreme civil power of the land. (Positive Christian commands like "Honor thy father and thy mother" cannot, interestingly, be added on the list, because obeying them could force us to violate more important prohibitions.)

What does all this mean in practice? What should an individual do to be moral? When all six laws of nature identified by Berkeley are given their appropriate positions, *Passive Obedience* actually lays a foundation for a surprisingly practical morality. The outcome is a layered view which provides a sketch of a minimalist private morality and very specific instructions on public ethics. The latter define the conditions under which we ought to act and refrain from acting in accordance with the laws of the land *and* the ways in which we can challenge them.

The core of private morals can be found in the laws of nature dictating that we should never lie under oath, commit adultery, steal, or commit murder. According to *Passive Obedience*, this list can be continued to comprise all absolute prohibitions that are decreed by "the principles of reason common to all mankind" [2]. The starting point of public ethics is the protection of social and political order. Individuals should never actively defy the supreme power either by doing what it prohibits or by resisting public authorities in the execution of their legal duties. Individuals should also usually act in the ways commanded by the supreme power, but the obligation ceases to bind them when

this would lead to violations of the moral laws of nature. Since people ought to observe the laws of nature, they have, in fact, a moral duty *not* to violate absolute prohibitions at the orders of their civic leaders. If they are in positions of subordinate power, they should also refuse to carry out orders which would violate the moral law. Passive obedience and passive resistance are compatible in Berkeley's system.

The last points are particularly intriguing, because they give credibility and moral fiber to the strict compliance that Berkeley seems to demand of individuals despite his own rational qualifications. Even if the supreme power were in the hands of madmen, usurpers, murderers, or politicians who do not share our views, we would not, even if passively obedient, be powerless. Subjects, including public officers, can render it impossible for immoral people to be in power by simply refusing to carry out orders that would force people to violate the laws of nature.

The fundamental questions concerning the nature and role of conscience and the existence, properties, and authority of God are not answered in *Passive Obedience*. It is possible that Berkeley was aware of this, and that his work on immaterialism and God as the maker and keeper of ideas can be seen as an attempt to provide a theoretical foundation for a scientific and non-nihilist morality. In this model, the function of Berkeley's theoretical philosophy is to fill in the blanks left by the outline of ethics presented in *Passive Obedience*.

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## Review

Georges Dicker, *Berkeley's Idealism: A Critical Examination*.  
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Georges Dicker has done us all the great service of producing a delightfully clear and analytically precise evaluation of Berkeley's metaphysics and epistemology. The sub-title of the book seems quite apt, for Dicker's evaluation of Berkeley's views is indeed "critical." Actually, maybe "apt" is not really the right word, for once one has read the whole book, one realizes that the sub-title is something of an understatement. Let me suggest a sub-title that sacrifices conciseness in the name of somewhat greater accuracy: *A Critical Examination that Reveals the Theory and the Arguments for it to be Complete Failures, both by Virtue of the Fact that the Theory is Inconsistent with Analytic Truths (such as the Causal Theory of Perception), Unable to Accommodate Obvious Distinctions (such as that Between Subjective and Objective Temporal Order), and Inconsistent with Common Sense (such as the View that Sensible Objects are Intersubjectively Perceivable), and by Virtue of the Fact that the Arguments for the Theory are Either Invalid (Mostly Because they Commit the Fallacy of Equivocation) or Based on False Premises*. Indeed, if Dicker's criticisms of Berkeley are on target, then the Good Bishop is best studied in early modern courses as an example of how *not* to do philosophy (e.g., how to fall into confusion and fallacy), rather than as a major intellect from whom there is much to learn.

Some philosophers will wonder whether there is any *point* to writing a book that is so relentlessly critical of its main subject. Why spend so much time and effort using Berkeley as a punching bag, when the history of philosophy is otherwise full of insights? But this seems to me unfair to Dicker. For of course it matters greatly whether Berkeley is right or wrong, and if it turns out that an analytically precise reconstruction of Berkeley's philosophy reveals it to be profoundly mistaken, then that is an important result in its own right.

But how good (i.e., how textually faithful and how analytically insightful) is Dicker's reconstruction? This is much too large of a question for me to attempt a complete answer to it here. But I *can* attempt a *partial* answer, and this is what I will do.

Dicker's book divides naturally into four parts. In Part One, Dicker sets the stage for his critical examination by outlining some central elements of Locke's metaphysics and epistemology: the positing of material substrata, the distinction between primary and secondary qualities, the representational theory of perception, and the account of sensitive knowledge (i.e., knowledge of a world of material objects outside our minds). In Part Two, Dicker reconstructs Berkeley's case for idealism in the first seven sections of the *Principles* and in the first of the *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*. In Part Three, Dicker explains how Berkeley tries to bolster his case for idealism by attacking the Lockean views discussed in Part One. And in Part Four, Dicker discusses

various aspects of Berkeley's positive world-view, with special attention to its vulnerability to objections. My review focuses on Part Two of the book, with special attention to the First Dialogue argument for idealism.

By (Berkeleyan) idealism, Dicker means the thesis that "what exists is only ideas and minds" (p. 4). It follows from this thesis that matter (or material substance), which is supposed to be neither idea nor mind, does not exist. It also follows that tables and chairs and other sensible objects, which are clearly not minds because they are not conscious and are incapable of perceiving anything, are ideas or collections thereof. And because the very existence of an idea, for Berkeley, consists in its being perceived (its *esse* is *percipi*), it follows that no sensible object can exist unperceived.

Dicker thinks Berkeley tries to establish something like the latter proposition by means of an "*opening syllogism*" extracted from the first three sections of the *Principles*. The syllogism (simplifying a little) is this (p. 71):

- (1) All the objects of human knowledge are ideas or collections of ideas. (PHK 1)
  - (2) No idea or collection of ideas can exist unperceived. (PHK 3)
- So, (3) No objects of human knowledge can exist unperceived.

Now surely this is an overstatement of Berkeley's position. Berkeley himself would deny (1), because he thinks that minds are objects of human knowledge. For example, he writes that "[w]e may be said to have some knowledge or notion of our own minds" (PHK 89, p. 211) and that he himself has "some knowledge or notion of [his] mind, and its acts about ideas" (PHK 142, p. 211). Given that Berkeley does not hold that minds are ideas, it follows that he rejects (1). But PHK 1 makes it quite clear that Berkeley wants to secure, not (1), but rather (1\*):

- (1\*) All sensible objects are ideas or collections of ideas.

I say this because, in Berkeley's universe, there are two kinds of sensible objects, both mentioned in PHK 1: sensible qualities (including colors, odors, tastes, sounds, tangible qualities, such as hot and cold, as well as motion, solidity, shape, size, and number) and physical objects (such as apples, stones, trees, and books).

What of premise (2)? Well, there is no doubt that Berkeley endorses (2) in PHK 3. But Dicker thinks that Berkeley provides an *argument* in support of (2). Dicker calls this argument "*the argument from the meaning of 'exist'*," and he finds it in a famous passage in PHK 3 where Berkeley says that "the table I write on, I say exists, that is, I see and feel it; and if I were out of my study I should say it existed, meaning thereby that if I was in my study I might perceive it, or that some other spirit actually does perceive it" (p. 70). But this is a mistake, I think. Berkeley clearly takes premise (2) to be self-evident: it is *obvious* to him that no idea or collection of ideas can exist unperceived. What is *not* obvious (at least initially) is that no *sensible object* can exist unperceived. It is *this* proposition—call it (3\*)—that Berkeley uses the table passage to establish.



So PHK 1-3 actually provide us with two separate trains of reasoning for the conclusion that sensible objects cannot exist unperceived. The first is this:

- (1\*) All sensible objects are ideas or collections of ideas. (PHK 1)
  - (2) No idea or collection of ideas can exist unperceived. (PHK 3)
- So, (3\*) No sensible object can exist unperceived. (PHK 3)

The second is contained in the “table” passage. As Dicker sees it, the argument is a “non-starter” (p. 74), but I think that this is a bit uncharitable. Let me explain.

Dicker claims that the main premise of the table passage is that the proposition expressed by (S) is identical to the proposition expressed by (D) (where X is a sensible thing):

- (S) X exists.
- (D) I perceive X *or* under appropriate circumstances I would perceive X *or* some other mind perceives X.

From this propositional identity, Dicker claims, Berkeley derives conclusion (E):

- (E) X exists only if I perceive X or some other mind perceives X.

From (E) it then follows (validly) that X exists only if X is perceived, and hence that no sensible object can exist unperceived.

Dicker then claims (rightly, of course) that the inference from the proposition-equivalence of (S) and (D) to conclusion (E) is a whopper of a fallacy, which is why he thinks the argument is a non-starter. But there are two problems with Dicker’s reconstruction here. First, no human being in her right mind would think that the proposition expressed by (S) is identical to the proposition expressed by (D). Second, Berkeley, who is surely aware of this, never tells us that what (S) says is the same as what (D) says. Berkeley’s thesis is that *on some occasions*, namely when I am perceiving X, (S) is used to mean that I perceive X, and that *on other occasions*, namely when I am *not* perceiving X, (S) is used either to mean that under appropriate circumstances I *might* (not “would”) perceive X or to mean that some other mind perceives X. In other words, Berkeley’s thesis is not that the proposition expressed by (S) is disjunctive, but rather that, when (S) is used, it is used to express one of three propositions, depending on its circumstances of use.

Now this doesn’t exactly get Berkeley out of trouble. For, after all, Berkeley *does* think that, at least sometimes, when I am not perceiving X and I say “X exists,” all I mean is that under appropriate circumstances, I might perceive X; that is, all I mean is that X is *perceivable*. And, Dicker might say, from the claim that under appropriate circumstances I might perceive X (that is, from the claim that X is *perceivable*) it doesn’t follow that X can’t exist unperceived.

But here's the thing. As Dicker himself recognizes (albeit around 200 pages later), Berkeley actually *argues* that the perceivability of sensible things entails that they can't exist unperceived! Dicker points to the following passage:

HYLAS: Yes, I grant the existence of a sensible thing consists in being perceivable, but not in being perceived.

PHILONOUS: And what is perceivable but an idea? And can an idea exist without being actually perceived? These are points long since agreed between us. (W 2: 234; p. 271)

Dicker's reconstruction of the argument in this passage (simplifying slightly) is this:

- (1) For something to be perceivable, it must exist.
- So, (2) For any idea to be perceivable, it must exist. (from [1])
- (3) For any idea to exist, it must be actually perceived.
- So, (4) For any idea to be perceivable, it must be actually perceived. (from [2] and [3])
- (5) Sensible things are identical with ideas.
- So, (6) For a sensible thing to be perceivable, it must be actually perceived. (from [4] and [5], by Leibniz's Law)

I think this reconstruction is erroneous. Philonous does not state either (1) or (2). What he says instead is this:

(1#) Anything that is perceivable is an idea.

And the argument Philonous runs is a *reductio* of Hylas's claim that the existence of a sensible thing consists in being perceivable, not in being perceived. The reasoning runs as follows:

- (AR) The existence of a sensible thing consists in being perceivable, not in being perceived.
- (1#) Anything that is perceivable is an idea.
- So, (2#) If the existence of Y consists in being perceivable, then Y is an idea. (from [1#])
- So, (3#) Sensible things are ideas. (from [AR] and [2#])
- (4#) The existence of an idea consists in being perceived.
- So, (5#) The existence of a sensible thing consists in being perceived. (from [3#] and [4#])
- So, (6#) It is not the case that the existence of a sensible thing consists in being perceived. (from [AR])

Given that (5#) and (6#) constitute a contradiction, Berkeley infers from the truth of (1#) and (4#) that the assumption for *reductio* is false.

Notice now that (1#) and (4#) together entail:

(7#) The existence of anything perceivable consists in being perceived.

And suppose that sometimes, when I say that table T exists, I mean that T is perceivable. It follows from (7#), then, that if what I say is true, the existence of T consists in being perceived, and thus T cannot exist unperceived.

Berkeley's argument in the "table" passage for the claim that the existence of sensible objects consists in being perceived, when appropriately supplemented, is therefore far from a non-starter. But it does rely on two claims: (i) that perceivable things (and so, sensible things) are ideas, and (ii) that ideas cannot exist unperceived.

But now, leaving out mention of idea-collections (which is otiose anyway, given that such collections are just complex ideas), (i) and (ii) are the two premises of the argument for idealism we reconstructed from PHK 1-3! The upshot is that *the argument from the meaning of "exist,"* properly understood, depends on (and so ultimately reduces to) the *opening syllogism,* properly understood. Indeed, this is not the only place in the early PHK sections where the syllogism appears. As Dicker's accurate reconstruction of the relevant passage reveals, the main argument of PHK 4 is a slight elaboration of the syllogism.

Here's the text:

What are [sensible objects] but the things we perceive by sense? And what do we perceive besides our own ideas or sensations? And is it not plainly repugnant that any one of these or any combination of them should exist unperceived? (PHK 4)

Dicker's accurate reconstruction, modified slightly, is this:

- (1) Sensible objects are what we perceive by sense.
- (2) What we perceive by sense are ideas.
- (3) Ideas cannot exist unperceived.

So, (4) Sensible objects cannot exist unperceived.

The slight elaboration here is a sub-argument for the first premise of the opening syllogism, properly understood:

- (1) Sensible objects are what we perceive by sense.
- (2) What we perceive by sense are ideas.

So, (1\*) Sensible objects are ideas.

If we put all this together, what we see is that ultimately the first four sections of the *Principles* build up to the argument of PHK 4 without reliance on any "non-starters." Instead of there being three separate arguments (one in PHK 1/3, another in PHK 3, and yet another in PHK 4), there is at bottom only one, which is far from invalid.

Now how should we evaluate the argument of PHK 4? In particular, would the argument persuade Berkeley's materialist, anti-idealist predecessors and contemporaries, such as Descartes and Locke? Dicker rightly notes that it would not, for Cartesians and Lockeans would surely insist that many of the things that we perceive by sense (including tables and chairs) are not ideas, but rather material substances whose existence does not depend on being perceived (p. 72). So Berkeley needs some sort of argument to establish (2), an argument based on premises that do not beg the question against his opponents. As Dicker also rightly notes, Berkeley provides such an argument in the First Dialogue (DHP 1).

How does Dicker analyze this argument? He claims that Berkeley begins by setting out some definitions or concepts (of "sensible thing," "immediate perception," and "sensible quality") and one important principle, which Dicker calls "the Principle of Perceptual Immediacy," or "(PPI)," definitions and principles that are then employed in the rest of DHP 1 to establish that sensible qualities are merely ideas (p. 90). I myself think that there is both more, and less, going on in the introductory section than Dicker thinks. So let's turn to this section.

Dicker thinks (rightly) that both Hylas and Philonous initially agree to D1:

D1: Sensible things = *df* things that are perceived by the senses. (p. 85)

He then claims that Berkeley offers us two definitions of the phrase "immediate perception," definitions that, so Dicker claims, Berkeley takes to be extensionally equivalent. Here are the two definitions:

D3: X is immediately perceived<sub>o</sub> = *df* X is perceived, and it is false that X would be perceived only if some item that is not identical with X and that is not a part of X were perceived.

D4: X is immediately perceived<sub>p</sub> = *df* X is perceived without (the perceiver's) performing any (conscious) inference. (p. 87)

There is also (PPI):

(PPI) Whatever is perceived by the senses is immediately perceived. (p. 87)

Dicker claims that Berkeley then combines (D1) and (PPI) to get a more precise definition of "sensible things," namely (D5):

D5: Sensible things = *df* things that are immediately perceived by the senses.

According to Dicker, Berkeley then "says what these sensible things are composed of: they are composed of sensible qualities," and finally "declares that sensible things are *therefore* nothing but sensible qualities and combinations of sensible qualities" (p. 89, italics added).

I agree with much of what Dicker says here, but there are four problems with his story. First, (D1) and (PPI) do not together entail (D5). But Berkeley is not guilty of invalid reasoning, for he accepts a slightly different version of (PPI), which, when conjoined with (D1), does entail (D5). Second, Berkeley is not just setting the stage for his later arguments that sensible qualities are only ideas: what he is doing is *arguing* for the conclusion that sensible objects are either sensible qualities or collections of sensible qualities. (Dicker notices Berkeley's use of "therefore," but neither highlights it nor extracts an argument from the relevant passage.) Third, it is a mistake to read the relevant passages as containing two definitions of immediate perception. Fourth, it is a mistake to foist on Berkeley either of the definitions of immediate perception that Dicker proposes: as I see it, Berkeley accepts neither (D3) nor (D4).

Let's start with the argument. Dicker is right that Berkeley accepts (D1):

PHILONOUS: What mean you by sensible things?

HYLAS: Those things which are perceived by the senses. Can you imagine that I mean anything else? (W 2: 174)

He is also right that Berkeley accepts something very like (PPI). But (D1) and (PPI) do not entail (D5). For (D1) says that sensible things are things that are perceived by the senses, and (PPI) says that whatever is perceived by the senses is immediately perceived. From the conjunction of (D1) and (PPI) it follows that sensible things are things that are immediately perceived, but it does not follow that sensible things are things that are immediately perceived *by the senses* [= (D5)]. And yet Berkeley does use (D1) and something like (PPI) to argue for (D5):

HYLAS: To prevent any more questions of this kind, I tell you once for all, that . . . in truth the senses perceive nothing which they do not perceive immediately. . . .

PHILONOUS: This point then is agreed between us, that *sensible things are those only which are immediately perceived by sense*. (W 2: 174)

Clearly, then, Berkeley is not merely assuming (PPI), but rather something from which (PPI) follows, namely (PPI\*):

(PPI\*) Whatever is perceived by the senses is immediately perceived by the senses.

So Dicker is right that Berkeley uses *a* principle of perceptual immediacy to argue from (D1) to (D5). It's just that the principle of perceptual immediacy that Berkeley uses is not exactly the principle that Dicker identifies as the one that Berkeley uses.

But there is more reasoning here than appears in Dicker's reconstruction of it. For Berkeley also introduces another statement that functions as a premise—call it "(P1)":

(P1) Everything that is immediately perceived by the senses is either a sensible quality or collection of sensible qualities.

Here is the passage:

PHILONOUS: You will farther inform me, whether we immediately perceive by sight any thing beside light, and colours, and figures: or by hearing, any thing but sounds: by the palate, any thing beside tastes: by the smell, beside odours: or by the touch, more than tangible qualities.

HYLAS: We do not. (W 2: 175)

Berkeley then puts (D1), (PPI\*), and (P1) together to get an argument for a claim that is stated in PHK 1 without argument, namely that every sensible thing is either a sensible quality or collection of sensible qualities. As Philonous puts it:

PHILONOUS: Sensible things therefore are nothing else but so many sensible qualities, or combinations of sensible qualities. (W 2: 175)

The argument is valid:

(D1) Sensible things = *df* things that are perceived by the senses.

(PPI\*) Whatever is perceived by the senses is immediately perceived by the senses.

(P1) Everything that is immediately perceived by the senses is either a sensible quality or collection of sensible qualities.

So, (C) Every sensible thing is either a sensible quality or collection of sensible qualities.

It is important that we see this argument for what it is: not just as a way of setting the stage for the important discussion of sensible qualities to follow, but as a critical piece of reasoning designed to get us part way to the conclusion that sensible things are ideas. For, indeed, all we need to add to the argument we have so far in order to get idealism is the thesis for which Berkeley argues in the rest of DHP 1, namely that every sensible quality is an idea. I think that Dicker probably doesn't disagree with this, but the fact that there is an argument here really flies under the radar in the book.

If this reconstruction of Berkeley's strategy for proving idealism in DHP 1 is correct, then it is critical that he avoid equivocation on the phrase "immediately perceived." But, according to Dicker, there is equivocation here, and it dooms Berkeley's argument for idealism.

Recall the two readings of "immediately perceived" Dicker offers us:

D3: X is immediately perceived<sub>o</sub> = *df* X is perceived, and it is false that X would be perceived only if some item that is not identical with X and that is not a part of X were perceived.

D4: X is immediately perceived<sub>p</sub> = *df* X is perceived without (the perceiver's) performing any (conscious) inference.

As Dicker sees it, there is a problem with the argument if (D3) is accepted. For although (P1) may be true if read through the lens of (D3), representationalists (including Locke) “will say that it is false that whatever is perceived by the senses is immediately perceived<sub>o</sub>, because material objects are perceived by the senses, but not immediately perceived<sub>o</sub>” (p. 131). In other words, if (D3) is accepted, then representationalists will reasonably reject (PPI) (and hence (PPI\*) as well). On the other hand, there is also a problem with the argument if (D4) is accepted. For although (PPI\*), read through the lens of (D4), is true, representationalists would now be well within their rights to deny (P1), for they hold that no conscious inference is required to perceive material objects by means of the senses, and yet material objects are not identical with sensible qualities or collections of sensible qualities. And if the phrase “immediately perceived” is given a (D3) reading in (P1) and a (D4) reading in (PPI\*), then Berkeley’s argument is straightforwardly invalid.

What is Dicker’s evidence that Berkeley adopts (D3)? The only passage Dicker cites is this one:

PHILONOUS: Or, may those things properly be said to be sensible, which are perceived mediately, or not without the intervention of others? (W 2: 174)

I see it as quite a leap to go from this passage to (D3), which involves a false complex counterfactual conditional that refers, not just to the objects mediately perceived, but also to their *parts*. Why not suppose that Berkeley has something far simpler in mind, something that derives directly from the etymology of the term “mediate”?

And what is Dicker’s evidence that Berkeley adopts (D4)? The only passage Dicker cites is this one:

HYLAS: In truth the senses perceive nothing which they do not perceive *immediately*: for they make no inferences. (W 2: 174-5)

But here Hylas is recapitulating in an extremely truncated manner a piece of reasoning that Philonous has just dragged him through. That the reasoning is truncated is evident from the fact that, literally speaking, it makes no sense to say that *the senses* perceive, immediately or otherwise; nor does it make sense to say that *the senses* make inferences. The reasoning that Philonous has just pushed Hylas to accept is this. By (D1) and (PPI\*), every sensible thing is immediately perceived by sense. Philonous says that it then “follow[s] from this,” and from the fact that it is by means of reason that one perceives the causes of sensible qualities, that the causes of sensible qualities are not themselves sensible things. In order to make sense of this argument, we must suppose that Berkeley is assuming that it is impossible for something to be immediately perceived by sense if it is perceived by means of reason. This is probably what Berkeley is trying to capture by having Hylas say that the senses “make no inferences.” But (D4) does not drop out of this: all that drops out is that reason can’t be involved in the immediate perception of an object by sense. This is compatible with (D4), but it is also compatible with many other accounts of the meaning of “immediately perceives,” including those that make no

reference to *conscious* inference. Indeed, the psychological aspect of consciousness that Dicker ties so closely to this particular conception of immediate perception is nowhere to be found in Berkeley's text.

Where, then, should we look for clarification of Berkeley's concept of immediate perception? I suggest *An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision* (NTV), the main thesis of which is that distance, magnitude, and situation are all perceived by sight, but only *mediately*! In NTV 9, which he titles "Some ideas perceived by mediation of others," Berkeley writes:

It is evident that, when the mind perceives any idea not immediately and of itself, it must be by the means of some other idea. Thus, for instance, the passions which are in the mind of another are of themselves to me invisible. I may nevertheless perceive them by sight; though not immediately, yet by means of the colours they produce in the countenance. We often see shame or fear in the looks of a man, by perceiving the changes of his countenance to red or pale.

The phrase that Berkeley uses to clarify the meaning of his technical term "mediately perceive" has since come to be known as the "by-locution." A spirit *S* mediately perceives an object *O* when and only when *S* perceives *O* *by* perceiving something other than *O* (a mediating entity *M* lying in some sense between *S* and *O*) that is in some way related to *O*. (D3) is an attempt to put a counterfactual spin on the by-locution, but as should be fairly obvious upon quick perusal of the literature on by-locution analysis, such a spin doesn't work. So why foist it on Berkeley when he himself doesn't use it?

Let's do a little more to clarify the way in which *M* must be related to *O* in order to perform its perceptual mediating function. Berkeley's fundamental term for this is "suggestion": that is, his view is that *S* mediately perceives *O* when *S* perceives a mediating entity *M* that suggests *O*. Suggestion itself is a relation of mental association that can be grounded in three different ways: (a) by stipulation (as when meanings are assigned to words), (b) by experience (as when the perception of lightning is invariably followed by a perception of thunder), or (c) by reason (as when the perception of a triangle leads one to think of a fact that one has proved about triangles, such as that their interior angles add up to 180 degrees). This is all a far cry from (D3).

As I see matters, then, Berkeley adopts (DIP) instead of (D3):

(DIP) *X* is immediately perceived = *df* *X* is perceived, but not by perceiving something numerically distinct from *X* that suggests *X*.

From (DIP), it then follows that *X* is immediately perceived by sense if and only if *X* is perceived by sense, but not by perceiving something numerically distinct from *X* that suggests *X*.

Now we can ask: How do (PPI\*) and (P1) fare when read through the lens of (DIP)? (PPI\*), so read, now says that whatever is perceived by the senses is not perceived by



perceiving something numerically distinct from X that suggests X. (P1), so read, now says that everything that is perceived by the senses, but not by perceiving something numerically distinct from it that suggests it, is a sensible quality or collection of sensible qualities. It is really impossible to say whether these two principles would be accepted or rejected by representationalists, until the phrase “perceived by the senses” is further clarified. For there is potential ambiguity here too: in saying that O is perceived by sense one might mean that O is perceived *partly* by sense or one might mean that O is perceived *wholly* by sense. I don’t have the space to discuss what I think are Berkeley’s changing views about whether to accept the “partly” or “wholly” conception here, but this is where I think the action is. In any event, I don’t think that Berkeley is guilty of a kind of simple-minded equivocation that depends on confusing two conceptions of immediate perception.

Suppose, now, that Berkeley’s argument that every sensible object is a sensible quality or collection of sensible qualities is sound. What remains to be discussed is Berkeley’s argument or arguments for the claim that every sensible quality is an idea. Now here Dicker adopts the standard story, which goes something like this. Berkeley uses a pain-pleasure argument to show that intense heat, intense cold, bitterness, and the smell of rotting flesh are pains, while moderate heat, moderate cold, sweetness, and the scent of my mother’s lasagna are pleasures. Perhaps because he sees that the pain-pleasure argument doesn’t work, or shows no more than that a limited set of secondary qualities are ideas, Berkeley switches quickly to the argument (or arguments) from perceptual relativity, an argument (or arguments) designed to establish the same conclusion as the pain-pleasure argument.

I think that the standard view is mistaken, and that Robert Muehlmann’s non-standard interpretation of these arguments in *Berkeley’s Ontology* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992) is closer to the truth (though I also differ from Muehlmann with respect to important details that need not concern us here). To see why, let’s begin by considering the pain-pleasure argument, or, more particularly, what Dicker calls Berkeley’s sub-argument for the first premise of the pain-pleasure argument (p. 93). On Dicker’s reconstruction, the argument, applied to the case of intense heat, is this:

- (1S) On putting one’s hand near a fire, one immediately perceives one uniform sensation or idea of intense heat and pain.
- (2S) If on putting one’s hand near a fire, one immediately perceives one uniform sensation of intense heat and pain, then the intense heat one immediately perceives is not distinct from the pain.

So, (3S) The intense heat one immediately perceives is not distinct from the pain. (p. 93)

Dicker then argues that the argument is “faulty” (p. 94), because Berkeley is caught on the horns of a dilemma, depending on two ways of understanding the phrase “intense heat,” either as “*quality* of intense heat” or as “*sensation* of intense heat.” If the phrase “intense heat” means the former, Dicker argues, then (2S) is false: for “the fact that one immediately perceives one uniform *sensation* of intense heat and pain does not imply that the *quality* of intense heat one immediately perceives is not distinct from the pain” (p.

94). And if the phrase “intense heat” means the latter, Dicker argues, then (2S) is true, but the conclusion, which identifies the *sensation* of intense heat with a pain, “comes nowhere close to establishing [what] Berkeley wants; namely, that the quality of intense heat is the same thing as the pain” (p. 94).

Now this strikes me as an uncharitable reading of the relevant passage, which is this:

- PHILONOUS: Upon putting your hand near the fire, do you perceive one simple uniform sensation, or two distinct sensations?  
 HYLAS: But one simple sensation.  
 PHILONOUS: Is not the heat immediately perceived?  
 HYLAS: It is.  
 PHILONOUS: And the pain?  
 HYLAS: True.  
 PHILONOUS: Seeing therefore they are both immediately perceived at the same time, and the fire affects you with one simple, or uncompounded idea, it follows that this same simple idea is both the intense heat immediately perceived, and the pain; and consequently, that the intense heat immediately perceived, is nothing distinct from a particular sort of pain.  
 HYLAS: It seems so. (W 2: 176)

Dicker kindly reproduces my favored reconstruction of this argument in his book, and then compares his reconstruction to mine. Here is my reconstruction:

- (1A) On putting one’s hand near a fire, one immediately perceives one uniform sensation.  
 (2A) On putting one’s hand near a fire, one immediately perceives intense heat and pain.  
 (3A) If one immediately perceives X and Y at the same time  $t$  and one immediately perceives one uniform sensation at  $t$ , then X is not distinct from Y.  
 So, (4A) The intense heat one immediately perceives on putting one’s hand near a fire is not distinct from the pain one immediately perceives at that time.

Leaving the minor difference between (1S) and (1A) aside, Dicker acknowledges that his interpretation is “less literal” than mine, and that my (2A) “limns” the text more closely than his (2S). What keeps him from accepting my reconstruction, he says, is that “(3A) is unintuitive and false as it stands” and he sees “no way to amend it so as to obtain a true statement” (p. 96).

But now I think that Dicker has morphed from the Grinch into Mother Teresa. I’m all for charity, but if charity requires that every one of a philosopher’s premises be read as true (by our lights), then the existence of real philosophical disagreement (e.g., between Berkeley and Locke) will turn out to be mere illusion! I agree with Dicker that (3A) is false. But this does not matter. The important question is whether it is reasonable to suppose that Berkeley takes it to be true, and here, I think, the text speaks clearly in favor of this supposition.

If one then asks whether a suitably revised version of (3S) is true, I think Dicker's claim that there is no way to amend it so as to obtain a true statement is surely an overstatement. For Dicker has actually provided such an amendment. Here is his best suggestion:

(3Ar\*\*) If one immediately perceives only X and Y by sense-modality S at *t* and one immediately perceives one uniform sensation by sense-modality S at *t*, then X is identical to Y.

What is wrong with (3Ar\*\*)? Dicker thinks it's vulnerable to the following counterexample: "Imagine that my visual field is completely filled by two black slabs, A and B, whose adjoining edges are so tightly conjoined that I cannot see any division between A and B. Then A and B give me one uniform black visual sensation, but it does not follow that A is identical with B" (p. 97).

But this counterexample fails. Dicker's mistake here lies in misconceiving Berkeley's idea of *uniformity as phenomenological*. But, as the relevant passage makes clear, Berkeley's conception of *uniformity* is one of *simplicity* or *lack of composition*: as he puts it, "the fire affects you with one simple, uncompounded idea." So it is false to say that A and B give Dicker one uniform black visual sensation. For the visible blackness is divisible into a left half and a right half, and thus can be thought of as a composite of two black expanses (which is certainly how we should think of the expanses if the slabs were pulled apart). The black visual sensation may be uniform in one sense, but it is not uniform in Berkeley's sense. I conclude that Dicker has given us no good reason to reject (3Ar\*\*), which is certainly all to the good from Berkeley's point of view.

Recall now that Dicker's criticism of the pain-pleasure sub-argument is that it equivocates on the term "intense heat," which could mean either "quality of intense heat" or "sensation of intense heat." Dicker finds evidence that Berkeley "equivocates between qualities and sensations" in the passage that immediately follows the proof that intense heat is a kind of pain. Here's the passage:

PHILONOUS: Again, try in your thoughts, Hylas, if you can conceive a vehement sensation to be without pain or pleasure.

HYLAS: I cannot.

PHILONOUS: Or can you frame to yourself an idea of sensible pain or pleasure, in general, abstracted from every particular idea of heat, cold, tastes, smells, &c.

HYLAS: I do not find that I can.

PHILONOUS: Doth it not therefore follow, that sensible pain is nothing distinct from those sensations or ideas,—in an intense degree? (W 2: 176-7)

Dicker's take on this argument is that its conclusion, which is no more than that pain is not distinct from the *sensations* of intense heat, cold, and so on, is "simply irrelevant to what Berkeley is trying to prove," namely that pain is not distinct from the *qualities* of intense heat, cold, and so on. If we are to read the conclusion as relevant, then we must

suppose that Berkeley fails to distinguish between sensations and qualities in setting up an argument that is supposed to show that qualities are no more than sensations!

I see why Dicker reads the passage in the way he does. But I think his reading is, yet again, excessively uncharitable. Of course, Berkeley is interested in proving that pain is not distinct from the *qualities* of intense heat, cold, and so on. He proposes to do so by relying on a principle about abstraction, namely, that what cannot be separated by the mind cannot be separated in reality. This principle entails, in particular, that if the idea of X cannot be abstracted (or mentally separated) from the idea of Y, then X and Y cannot be separated in reality (i.e., X is not distinct from Y). In the middle of the passage, Berkeley states a clear instance of this principle, namely that if the idea of pain cannot be abstracted from the ideas of intense heat/cold/tastes/smells and so on, then pain itself is not distinct from intense heat/cold/tastes/smells and so on themselves. In other words, Berkeley is giving us a principle whereby an identity of qualities follows from the impossibility of mentally separating ideas that represent those qualities. There is no equivocation here, and the principle delivers the right result by means of a valid argument that looks like this:

(B1) If the idea of X cannot be abstracted from the idea of Y, then X is not distinct from Y.

(B2) The idea of intense heat cannot be abstracted from the idea of pain.

So, (B3) Intense heat is not distinct from pain.

Berkeley, as it happens, just botches his presentation of this argument by referring in a seemingly question-begging way to intense heat as a “vehement sensation,” and by stating the conclusion as the non-distinctness of pain with certain “sensations or ideas—in an intense degree.” It is no surprise that Berkeley should have made this mistake: he does, after all, *believe* that intense heat and so on *are* vehement sensations! The moral is not that Berkeley equivocates between qualities and sensations, but that he should have chosen his language more carefully in his presentation of the argument I have charitably attributed to him.

Let us move on to the argument (or arguments) from perceptual relativity (APR). I say “arguments” because Dicker thinks that there are actually two versions of APR. Let me begin with what Dicker thinks of as the “first version” of APR.

Dicker claims that the “first and fullest statement of the first-version APR concerns the qualities of heat and cold” (p. 100). Here is the relevant passage:

PHILONOUS: Those bodies, therefore, upon whose application to our own, we perceive a moderate degree of heat, must be thought to have a moderate degree of heat or warmth in them; and those, upon whose application we feel a like degree of cold, must be thought to have cold in them.

HYLAS: They must.

PHILONOUS: Can any doctrine be true that necessarily leads a man into an absurdity?

HYLAS: Without doubt it cannot.

PHILONOUS: Is it not an absurdity to think that the same thing should be at the same time both cold and warm?

HYLAS: It is.

PHILONOUS: Suppose now one of your hands hot, and the other cold, and that they are both at once placed into the same vessel of water, in an intermediate state; will not the water seem cold to one hand, and warm to the other?

HYLAS: It will.

PHILONOUS: Ought we not therefore, by your principles, to conclude that it is really both cold and warm at the same time, that is, according to your concession, to believe an absurdity?

HYLAS: I confess it seems so.

PHILONOUS: Consequently, the principles themselves are false, since you have granted that no true principle leads to an absurdity. (W 2: 178-9)

Dicker rightly points out that this argument is a *reductio*. But he thinks that Philonous's opening statement does not clearly identify the assumption for *reductio*. The part before the semi-colon, says Dicker, suggests that the *reductio* assumption is (a):

- (a) Material things really have whatever moderate degree of heat (or cold) one perceives in them.

But the part after the last comma ("must be thought to have cold in them") suggests that the *reductio* assumption is (b):

- (b) Material things in which one perceives a moderate degree of cold (or heat) really have the quality of cold (or heat) in them.

The difference between these statements is subtle. (a) says that if one perceives a material object O to have quality Q in degree D, then O really has quality Q in degree D. (b) says that if one perceives a material object O to have quality Q in degree D, then O really has quality Q. What (b) does not say, but (a) does say, is that O must have quality Q *in the degree it is perceived to have it*. From (a), I can conclude from the fact that I perceive a fire to be intensely hot that the fire really is *intensely* hot; but from (b), all I can conclude from the same fact is that the fire has *some degree of heat*.

Dicker claims that if (a) is the *reductio* assumption, then the *reductio* "cannot be used to support Berkeley's thesis that . . . heat and cold are merely . . . ideas." By contrast, he says, "only if (b) is the assumption to be disproved can the argument support [that thesis]" (p. 101). Assuming, then, that the argument is designed to show that heat and cold are merely ideas, Dicker interprets the argument as directed against both (a) and (b), and reconstructs it as follows:

- (1) Heat and cold are qualities of material things. (Assumption for *reduction*.)
  - (2) The same material thing . . . can seem hot to one hand and cold to the other.
- So, (3) The same material thing can be both hot and cold. (p. 101)

Dicker then claims that the argument commits a “basic fallacy,” namely that of confusing “seeming with being”: for the argument moves “from a single premise about how things are together with a single premise about how things seem, to a completely new statement about how things are” (p. 105).

My sense of all this is that Dicker misunderstands APR, that the argument he rightly criticizes as invalid is not the argument that Berkeley puts forward in the relevant passage. The main problem, I believe, is that Dicker unthinkingly assumes, along with the standard view, that the purpose of APR is to establish that heat and cold are ideas. This assumption distorts his interpretation of the passage, and leads him to criticize Berkeley unfairly.

Let me explain. The first thing to notice is that Dicker misidentifies the assumption for *reductio*. Here, again, is what Philonous says:

PHILONOUS: Those bodies, therefore, upon whose application to our own, we perceive a moderate degree of heat, must be thought to have a moderate degree of heat or warmth in them; and those, upon whose application we feel a like degree of cold, must be thought to have cold in them.

Notice the use of “therefore” in the first sentence. Philonous must think that the assumption for *reductio* here follows from something else to which Hylas has already committed himself. But if we look at the speech of Hylas’s that immediately precedes this passage, we find nothing that could serve as a reason for holding anything Philonous says in the passage. So what, and where, is the assumption that commits Hylas to the assumption for *reductio*? The answer is that the assumption is stated quite explicitly by Hylas himself just a few pages earlier. Hylas says this:

HYLAS: Whatever degree of heat we perceive by sense, we may be sure the same exists in the object that occasions it. (W 2: 175)

We can put this claim in the following terms:

(Ga) Material things really have whatever degree of heat (or cold) one perceives in them.

This claim is a clear generalization of (a), which concerns *moderate* degrees of heat:

(a) Material things really have whatever moderate degree of heat (or cold) one perceives in them.

What this strongly suggests, then, is that (Ga) is the assumption for *reductio*. Philonous’s plan is to attack (a), and thereby show that (Ga) is false.

I have argued that (Ga) is the target of APR. Now Dicker thinks that Berkeley also targets (b), because, so Dicker claims, the falsity of (b), but not the falsity of (a), might

reasonably be thought to establish that heat and cold are nothing but ideas. But it is an interesting fact that this claim of Dicker's is false. Recall (b):

- (b) Material things in which one perceives a moderate degree of cold (or heat) really have the quality of cold (or heat) in them.

We can restate (b) a bit more perspicuously as follows:

- (b\*) For every material thing  $X$  and for every subject  $S$ , if  $S$  perceives a moderate degree of cold/heat in  $X$ , then  $X$  really has cold/heat in  $X$ .

Suppose, now, that (b) is false. What does this mean? It means this:

- (not-b) For some material thing  $X$  and for some subject  $S$ ,  $S$  perceives a moderate degree of cold/heat in  $X$ , but  $X$  does not have cold/heat in  $X$ .

From (not-b), we may infer (not-b-cons):

- (not-b-cons) For some material thing  $X$ ,  $X$  does not have cold/heat in  $X$ .

But from this result it does not follow that heat and cold are nothing but ideas. In order to show that heat and cold are nothing but ideas, one would need to establish the following universal generalization:

- (u) For every material thing  $X$ ,  $X$  does not have cold/heat in  $X$ .

But (u) does not follow from (not-b) or (not-b-cons). So it is not reasonable for anyone, let alone Berkeley, to believe that establishing the falsity of (b) really goes any way towards establishing that heat and cold are nothing but ideas.

What this means is that, whether the assumption for *reductio* is taken to be (Ga), (a), or (b), APR is not being used to show that heat and cold are not qualities of material things (but rather ideas). It follows directly that Dicker's reconstruction of APR is mistaken.

What, then, *is* the proper reconstruction of APR? Well, it begins with the assumption for *reductio*, namely (Ga):

- (Ga) Material things really have whatever degree of heat (or cold) one perceives in them.

As I have already argued, (Ga) entails (a):

- (a) Material things really have whatever moderate degree of heat (or cold) one perceives in them.

Philonous then gets Hylas to accept the following assumption:

(HC-imp) It is impossible for the same thing to have a moderate degree of heat and a moderate degree of cold at the same time.

And then Philonous imagines a hypothetical situation in which the following fact obtains:

(P) Subject *S*, who dips a cold hand in water *W* and a warm hand in *W* at the same time, perceives *W* to have a moderate degree of heat in *W* and a moderate degree of cold in *W* at the same time.

The reasoning to a contradiction is now straightforward. From (P) and (a), it follows that *W* has a moderate degree of heat and a moderate degree of cold at the same time. But, from (HC-imp), we know that *W* does not have a moderate degree of heat and a moderate degree of cold at the same time. Contradiction. Assuming that (P) and (HC-imp) are true, it follows that (a) is false, and hence that (Ga) is false as well. The upshot is that it is a mistake for Hylas to think that material things really have whatever degree of heat (or cold) one perceives in them.

The obvious question, then, is why Berkeley *cares* about establishing the falsity of (Ga). How is this supposed to move him any closer to establishing that all sensible qualities are ideas? Answer: it doesn't, *but it's not meant to!* The point of APR is to beat up on relatively unsophisticated materialists, such as Aristotle, who think that perception works by means of the transmission of accidental forms through various media to our sense organs, forms that are then stored by the imagination as phantasms, and then intellectualized as notions. If Aristotle's theory of perception is true, then material objects really do have all the sensible qualities we perceive them to have. What APR shows is that material objects *don't* necessarily have all the sensible qualities we perceive them to have, and hence that Aristotle's theory of perception is false. This is an important and perfectly respectable result.

Let me now move on to what Dicker thinks of as the "second version" of APR. Dicker finds the "first and fullest statement of this argument" in the following passage, which I have simplified slightly:

PHILONOUS: Is it your opinion the very figure and extension which you perceive by sense exist in the outward object or material substance?

HYLAS: It is.

PHILONOUS: Have all other animals as good grounds to think the same of the figure and extension which they see and feel?

HYLAS: Without doubt, if they have any thought at all. . . .

PHILONOUS: A mite therefore must be supposed to see his own foot, and things equal or even less than it, as bodies of some considerable dimension; though at the same time they appear to you scarce discernible, or at best as so many visible points?

HYLAS: I cannot deny it. . . .

PHILONOUS: Can one and the same thing be at the same time in itself of different dimensions?



HYLAS: That were absurd to imagine.

PHILONOUS: But, from what you have laid down it follows that the extension by you perceived, and that perceived by the mite itself . . . are each of them the true extension of the mite's foot; that is to say, by your own principles you are led into an absurdity. (W 2: 188-9)

Dicker thinks of this APR as “subtly different” from what he takes to be the first version of APR (p. 108). Recall Dicker's reconstruction of the first version (the “F” stands for “first”):

- (F1) Heat and cold are qualities of material things. (Assumption for *reductio*)
- (F2) The same material thing . . . can seem hot to one hand and cold to the other.
- So, (F3) The same material thing can be both hot and cold. (p. 101)

Here, now, is his reconstruction of the argument from the “mite” passage (the “S” stands for “second”):

- (S1) The very shape and size perceived by sense in an object is always that of the object itself. (Assumption for *reductio*)
- (S2) An object's shape and size looks (seems, appears) different to different perceivers, different species of perceivers, and to the same perceiver under different conditions of observation.
- So, (S3) An object can actually have many incompatible shapes and sizes.

Notice that the arguments are similar inasmuch as (F2) resembles (S2), and (F3) resembles (S3). Focus now on (F2) and (S2). Dicker sees in the “mite” passage commitment to the assumption that “an object's shape and size seems different . . . to the same perceiver under different conditions of observation.” But this is not accurate. The “mite” passage does not consider what Hylas's principles commit him to in a hypothetical situation in which a single perceiver perceives a material object to have two different sizes or two different shapes at the same time. There is good reason for this: it is very difficult, if not impossible, to place a single perceiver in a situation similar to the “water” example with respect to the perception of different shapes or sizes by sight. So Dicker is right that the argument contained in the “water” passage and the argument contained in the “mite” passage are different, but the difference in the arguments is not the difference he sees in the arguments. According to Dicker, the main difference between the two arguments concerns (F1) and (S1). According to (F1), heat and cold are in material things. According to (S1), a particular shape (size) is in a (presumably material) thing whenever it is perceived by sense to be in that thing. However, as I've argued, (F1) is not the *reductio* assumption of the argument from the “water” passage: (Ga) is. And, interestingly, (Ga) corresponds exactly to (S1): what (Ga) says about heat and cold, (S1) says about size and shape.

This suggests that the argument of the “mite” passage corresponds almost perfectly (*modulo* the fact that it concerns the perception of different sensible qualities by different perceivers rather than the perception of different sensible qualities by the same perceiver)

to the argument of the “water” passage. And, indeed, the arguments are very similar. Begin with the assumption for *reductio*, a slightly amended version of (S1):

- (S1) Material things really have whatever shape and size any perceiver perceives in them.

Philonous then gets Hylas to accept the following assumption, which says about shape and size what (HC-imp) says about temperature:

- (HC-imp\*) It is impossible for the same thing to have different shapes (sizes) at the same time.

And then Philonous imagines a hypothetical situation in which a fact very similar to (P) obtains:

- (P\*) One perceiver perceives a material object to be of a certain shape (size), while another perceiver perceives the same object to be of a different shape (size), at the same time.

The reasoning to a contradiction is now straightforward. From (P\*) and (S1), it follows that the same object O has different shapes (sizes) at the same time. But, from (HC-imp\*), we know that O cannot have different shapes (sizes) at the same time. Hence, the contradiction. Assuming that (P\*) and (HC-imp\*) are true, it follows that (S1) is false. The upshot is that it is a mistake for Hylas to think that material things really have whatever shape (size) one perceives in them. If my reconstruction of these arguments is correct, then Dicker makes a mistake in thinking that the two “versions” of APR he identifies have significantly different assumptions for *reductio*.

Given that Dicker has misidentified the argument and the reasoning of the “mite” passage, it won’t be surprising to learn that he also miscalculates the argument. Dicker thinks that the argument from (S1) and (S2) to (S3) is “simply not valid” (p. 109). He is right about this, of course, but his correct evaluation of the (S1)-(S3) argument doesn’t matter, because, as I’ve just argued, *this is not the argument of the “mite” passage!* Still, Dicker thinks that the “mite” passage “may be felt as quite persuasive,” and his diagnosis is that the (S1)-(S3) argument “can easily be converted into a valid [argument], by reformulating [(S2) as (S2’)]” (p. 110):

- (S2’) Many incompatible shapes and sizes are perceived by sense in an object.

After conversion, Dicker’s reconstruction of the “mite” passage argument looks like this:

- (S1) The very shape and size perceived by sense in an object is always that of the object itself. (Assumption for *reductio*)  
 (S2’) Many incompatible shapes and sizes are perceived by sense in an object.  
 So, (S3) An object can actually have many incompatible shapes and sizes.

With the addition of (HC-imp\*), the claim that the same thing cannot actually have many incompatible shapes and sizes at the same time, this *appears to be* almost exactly the APR that I have extracted from the “mite” passage: for (S2') is, *modulo* lack of reference to the same time and modulo lack of reference to material objects, logically equivalent to (P\*). However, the lack of reference to material objects in (S2') turns out to be of the utmost importance with respect to the evaluation of the argument.

Dicker's worry is that premise (S2') of the amended argument leads to unintuitive ontological profligacy. Dicker writes:

According to [(S2')], [each perceiver in the “mite” case] sees an object that actually has a different shape and size. So [(S2')] forces us to conclude that each [perceiver] sees a different object, since a single object cannot have different shapes and sizes at the same time. (p. 115)

By contrast, says Dicker,

[(S2)] seems to be just an obvious and completely commonplace fact, based on the laws of perspective, that when people look at an object from different vantage points, that very object may look, appear, or seem different to them. There is nothing even faintly suspect about saying that in such a case, they all see one and the same object, though they see it differently. (p. 116)

So, as Dicker sees it, Berkeley is caught in another dilemma. If Berkeley relies on (S2'), then he ends up with a bloated ontology; but if he replaces (S2) with the “commonplace” (S2), then his argument is invalid.

There are two things to be said about Dicker's criticism here. The first is that Dicker has lost sight of the fact that the relevant argument is a *reductio*. Berkeley's point is that materialist principles [here, (S1), (S2'), and (HC-imp\*)] lead to absurdity. Philonous does not himself endorse (S2'): *Hylas* the materialist does. This is why it is important to read (S2') as applying to *material* objects: what *Hylas* accepts is that the object perceived by the mite is the same object as the object perceived by me. His reason for thinking this is that the mite and I are both looking at the same *material* object. If physical objects such as mite's feet were merely collections of ideas in minds, then it would not be obvious that the mite and I are perceiving the same object. Dicker is therefore mistaken in thinking that the argument from the “mite” passage commits Berkeley to a bloated ontology.

Now, as it happens, Berkeley *does* have a bloated ontology. For, although he eschews material objects, he accepts that physical objects really do have the sensible qualities they appear to us to possess. He is even happy to accept that an oar dipped in water that looks crooked *is* crooked! His diagnosis of the “crooked oar illusion” is not that the oar is straight but merely *appears* crooked. Rather, what a person who sees the oar as crooked “immediately perceives by sight is certainly crooked; and so far he is in the right.” The person's mistake does not lie in “the ideas he actually perceives; but in the inferences he makes from his present perceptions,” for example that “upon taking the oar out of the

water he shall perceive the same crookedness; or that it would affect his touch, as crooked things are wont to do” (W 2: 238). So if Berkeley did not think that the mite and I were perceiving different feet, then he would be committed to the absurd view that the same foot has different dimensions at the same time.

But none of this is a real problem for Berkeley, because, as it happens, he has an *argument* for his bloated ontology. Consider his discussion of the “moon” example in NTV:

Suppose, for example, that looking at the moon I should say it were fifty or sixty semidiameters of the earth distant from me. Let us see what moon this is spoken of: It is plain it cannot be the visible moon, or anything like the visible moon, or that which I see, which is only a round, luminous plain of about thirty visible points in diameter. For in case I am carried from the place where I stand directly toward the moon, it is manifest the object varies, still as I go on; and by the time that I am advanced fifty or sixty semidiameters of the earth, I shall be so far from being near a small, round, luminous flat that I shall perceive nothing like it; this object having long since disappeared. (NTV 44; W 1: 187)

Berkeley’s point is that the moon that he sees from the Earth is only “a small, round, luminous flat.” Were he to be carried “toward the moon,” he would, after a while, cease to see a “small, round, luminous flat,” but rather a “vast opaque globe, with several unequal risings and valleys” mentioned in *Alciphron* 4.9 (W 3: 153). By Leibniz’s Law, Berkeley concludes that the small, round, luminous flat seen at  $t1$  (Moon1) is numerically distinct from the vast opaque globe seen at  $t2$  (Moon2).

Of course, the materialist will scoff at Berkeley’s description of what is seen in this thought-experiment. The materialist will say instead that there is only one moon, a moon that appears when seen from Earth to be a small, round, luminous flat, when it is actually in itself a vast opaque globe. But notice that the materialist must deny the very commonsensical statement that what one sees from Earth is small, luminous, round, and flat. Berkeley therefore not only has an *argument* for his bloated ontology; he can also point out that the materialist can only defend his ontological minimalism by running afoul of common sense.

Ultimately, then, the argument of the “mite” passage, which is almost perfectly parallel to the argument of the “water” passage (the only difference being the reference to different perceivers in the former and to the same perceiver in the latter), turns out to be valid and therefore represents a serious objection to materialism. If it is then pointed out to Berkeley that premises similar to the very same argument force him to accept a bloated ontology, his response is to embrace ontological profligacy for solid philosophical reasons that, unlike materialism, are consistent with common sense.

I have argued, *contra* Dicker, that the sole function of APR, properly understood, is *ad hominem*: Berkeley means APR as a *reductio* of materialism and nothing more. In particular, Berkeley does not use APR to establish that all sensible qualities, including

primary qualities, are ideas. But then, I hear you ask on Dicker's behalf, doesn't Philonous move to APR after having recognized that the pain-pleasure argument cannot be used to establish that all sensible qualities are ideas? Doesn't Philonous appeal to APR because he needs it to establish what the pain-pleasure argument fails to show? These questions presuppose what I have been calling the standard view. So it is important to see that the standard view is false.

Dicker rightly points out, as many others have, that Philonous applies the pain-pleasure argument to no more than the following sensible qualities: heat, cold, taste, and smell. In particular, Philonous does not apply the pain-pleasure argument to color or sound. Moreover, at a critical juncture in the conversation, Philonous appears to recognize that he has no way of countering Hylas's suggestion that moderate heat (or warmth) is neither pain nor pleasure, but rather a privation (or lack) of pain and pleasure (i.e., an indolence). And it is immediately after this seeming recognition that Philonous proposes APR. Finally, as Dicker rightly points out, Philonous goes on to apply APR to a host of sensible qualities other than heat and cold, including tastes, smells, colors, size, and shape. All of this suggests that Berkeley means for APR to pick up where the pain-pleasure argument leaves off.

But the suggestion needs to be resisted. In the first place, although it is true that Berkeley fails to apply the pain-pleasure argument to colors and sounds, it is fairly obvious that this is something he *could* easily do. Recall that Berkeley infers, from the fact that pain and intense heat are perceived at the same time without being distinguished, that intense heat *is* a kind of pain. Similarly, Berkeley could easily infer, from the fact that pain and intense sounds (or colors) are perceived at the same time without being distinguished, that intense sounds (and intense colors) are pains. Just picture yourself at a rock concert, and you will see what I mean. Or imagine Voldemort shining an intense red light in your eyes. So if Berkeley does not apply the pain-pleasure argument to sounds and colors, this is purely for stylistic reasons. There is nothing wrong with repeating an argument, but surely after one has run it three times, there is no need to run it a fourth or a fifth time. Even the thickest materialist will have gotten the point after the second iteration.

In the second place, what appears to be a critical juncture is far from it. Contrary to popular belief, Philonous does *not* acknowledge that the pain-pleasure argument can't be used to dislodge Hylas from the thesis that heat and cold are privations of pain and pleasure. Here is the sum total of Philonous's reaction to the privation suggestion:

PHILONOUS: If you are resolved to maintain that warmth, or a gentle degree of heat, is no pleasure, I know not how to convince you otherwise, than by appealing to your own sense. (W 2: 178)

I think many readers, even very thoughtful interpreters, stop reading at the word "otherwise." What they see in this passage is Philonous's acknowledgement that he is unable to convince Hylas of the falsity of the suggestion that moderate heat (or cold) is an indolence. *But this is not what Philonous says!* We need to read *all the way to the end of the relevant sentence*. What Philonous says, properly understood, is that he sees no way

of convincing Hylas of the falsity of the indolence suggestion *except by appeal to Hylas's own sense*. He is telling Hylas to pay close attention to what he is sensing when he senses moderate heat or cold, and implies that if he does this carefully, he will convince himself that these qualities are sensations, *indifferent* sensations perhaps, but sensations nonetheless. So Philonous is not giving up on the pain-pleasure argument: far from it.

In the third place, the fact that Philonous applies APR to primary qualities—qualities to which he does not apply the pain-pleasure argument and to which the pain-pleasure argument clearly does not apply even if he wanted it to—does not show that he relies on APR to show that primary qualities are ideas. The reason for this is that Philonous uses a separate argument to establish the ideational nature of primary qualities on the basis of the ideational nature of secondary qualities. The argument appears in the following passage:

PHILONOUS: But for your farther satisfaction, try if you can frame the ideas of any figure, abstracted from all particularities of size, or even from other sensible qualities.

HYLAS: Let me think a little—I do not find that I can.

PHILONOUS: And can you think it possible, that should really exist in Nature, which implies a repugnancy in its conception?

HYLAS: By no means.

PHILONOUS: Since therefore it is impossible even for the mind to disunite the ideas of extension and motion from all other sensible qualities, doth it not follow, that where the one exist, there necessarily the other exist likewise?

HYLAS: It should seem so.

PHILONOUS: Consequently the very same arguments which you admitted, as conclusive against the secondary qualities, are without any farther application of force against the primary too. (W 2: 194)

The argument here is simple. Primary qualities and secondary qualities cannot be separated by the mind; but any two things that cannot be separated by the mind cannot be separated in reality; so primary qualities and secondary qualities cannot be separated in reality; moreover, as the pain-pleasure argument shows, secondary qualities are ideas; but whatever can't exist apart from an idea in reality must itself be an idea; therefore, primary qualities too are ideas. QED. So this argument, together with the pain-pleasure argument (appropriately extended to all secondary qualities, including colors and sounds), establishes to Berkeley's satisfaction that *all* qualities, without exception, are ideas. APR is not needed for this purpose. And indeed, as I have argued, that is not the reason why Berkeley appeals to it. The function of APR is *negative*, and Berkeley's case for idealism does not rely on it.

Let us now stop and take stock. Although Dicker correctly identifies some of the premises of Berkeley's argument for idealism, the reconstructions he offers of the various sub-arguments are all seriously flawed. And although Dicker is right that the flawed reconstructions he identifies are all invalid, question-begging, or unintuitive, this is no skin off Berkeley's nose: for, properly understood, none of the sub-arguments for which

Dicker offers flawed reconstructions is obviously or clearly problematic. Dicker is, I am guessing, a materialist, and so am I (at least, most of the time). The difference between us is that whereas *Dicker* thinks that Berkeley's argument for idealism is multiply flawed in sophomoric ways that can serve as object-lessons in how not to philosophize well, *I* think that the argument represents a very serious, analytically rigorous, and philosophically respectable challenge to materialism. If Dicker were right, then Berkeley's challenge would be not much more than a philosophical curiosity, a kind of argument that, in Hume's words, produces no more than "momentary amazement and irresolution and confusion" (*An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section 12, Part 1, fn. 32). The *Principles* and the *Dialogues* could be expunged from the history of western philosophy canon, and those of us already schooled in how to avoid fallacies would be none the worse for it. But, happily for all serious admirers of Berkeley's work, Dicker is wrong. Despite Dicker's best efforts to stop it in its tracks, Berkeley's argument for idealism lives on.<sup>1</sup>

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## Review

Luc Peterschmitt. *Berkeley et la chimie: Une philosophie pour la chimie au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle.*  
Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2011. 303 pp.  
ISBN: 978-2-812-40266-0

*Siris* has received more scholarly attention in the last few years than in any other period since its publication, but it remains, nonetheless, the least studied and the least understood work in Berkeley's *oeuvre*. Luc Peterschmitt's even-handed and erudite *Berkeley et la chimie* is the first full-length monograph on *Siris*, and it is both a compelling rehabilitation of Berkeley's last major work, and the most substantial single contribution to our understanding of *Siris*' aims as a whole.

When *Siris* is read at all, it is typically read for its scattered remarks on themes from Berkeley's early works. Otherwise, it is considered a curiosity at best and at worst a hermetic, heteroclitic record of Berkeley's intellectual decline. The consensus is that *Siris*' neglect is well-deserved. The principal aims of Peterschmitt's study are to demonstrate that *Siris*' apparent obscurity is an artifact of historical ignorance, and to show that once *Siris* has been properly situated in the context of early 18<sup>th</sup> century chemical treatises, it can be appreciated as a philosophically significant work of apologetics. According to Peterschmitt, *Siris* presents its apology in the form of a natural theology grounded in a distinctively Berkeleian philosophy of chemistry. In the course of developing this interpretation, Peterschmitt discusses issues which typically exercise commentators who engage with *Siris*, including the ontological status of corpuscles and active physical principles. These discussions are nuanced and ingenious, but they are particularly valuable for the way in which Peterschmitt shows how Berkeley addresses these issues to advance his overarching goals in *Siris*. This path-breaking book should be read by anyone seeking a comprehensive understanding of Berkeley's philosophy and will be indispensable for students of Berkeley's philosophy of science.

The book is divided into two parts. The first examines the aim and structure of *Siris*, focusing primarily on its form and style, and the second develops a critical exposition of Berkeley's chemical theory and his philosophy of chemistry.

In the first part, "Berkeley et la philosophie chimique," Peterschmitt argues that *Siris* is, throughout, a work of philosophy by Berkeley's own lights. Peterschmitt domesticates *Siris* by offering a new interpretation of Berkeley's reliance on ancient sources (which often tempts readers to suspect that Berkeley prefers the lucubrations of Hellenistic alchemists to the theories of 18<sup>th</sup> century chemists) and by arguing that Berkeley never steps beyond the limits of metaphysical discourse established in *De Motu*. According to Peterschmitt, *Siris* should be considered a work of philosophy for much the same reason that *Alciphron* should be. Its cosmological, iatrochemical, and theological speculations are subordinate to the development of an apologetic addressed to free-thinkers who appeal to natural philosophy in order to develop arguments for deism or atheism. The



balance of the first part of the book is devoted to answering the interpretive questions that this new reading of *Siris* raises. If *Siris* is a work of philosophy, then it becomes important to examine the relationship between it and Berkeley's earlier philosophical works and to determine whether Berkeley's philosophy evolved. Peterschmitt also explores Berkeley's motivations for publishing a work devoted primarily to chemistry, attempting to explain among other things, Berkeley's apparent lack of interest in chemistry prior to *Siris*.

Taking a cue from Bertil Belfrage, Peterschmitt appeals to the principle of "Autonomous Fields of Discourse" from *De Motu* in order to specify the aim and nature of *Siris*. In *De Motu*, he points out, Berkeley argues that metaphysics, physics, and mechanics are autonomous disciplines distinguished by their methods and objects. Physicists aim to predict future events by means of observations and descriptions of past events, and mechanists develop general laws and theories to facilitate prediction. Only metaphysicians refer events to true causes, entities which can be considered active in a philosophically strict sense. These distinct fields of inquiry form a hierarchy. The aims of physics and mechanics are subservient to the aims of metaphysics in the sense that it is impossible to derive metaphysical principles from the observations on which physicists and mechanics rely, but necessary to ensure that the results of physics and mechanics are consistent with metaphysical principles which are established *a priori*. Thus, Peterschmitt proposes that *Siris* is not a work of natural philosophy but rather a work in which natural philosophy is submitted to metaphysical scrutiny in order to purify it of metaphysical claims that cannot be established from within natural philosophy.

Though Berkeley alludes to the work of chemists in earlier works (e.g., the *Theory of Vision*), Peterschmitt suggests that Berkeley's privileges chemistry in *Siris* for the first time because of developments both in chemistry and in Berkeley's understanding of the field. It was Berkeley's work with tar-water in the 1730s and 1740s which led him to examine contemporary treatises in which chemical theory was established as a legitimate branch of natural philosophy. It was only then that Berkeley saw that it would be possible to develop a philosophy for chemistry. Even though chemistry could be considered a separate and well-defined branch of science at the time Berkeley composed *Siris*, there had yet to emerge a figure to unify the field in the way that Newton unified mechanics in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. So in *Siris*, Berkeley not only develops a philosophy for chemistry, he also attempts to unify the field of chemistry—not as a chemist, but as a philosopher.

Berkeley develops his analysis by subjecting the work of prominent 18<sup>th</sup> century chemists (especially the works of Homberg, Newton, and Boerhaave) to immaterialist critiques. This allows him to determine which of their claims could be true. But since chemistry was not yet a unified field, Berkeley was faced with a number of apparently competing claims. He adjudicates between them without performing novel experiments (as a chemist would) by showing that the disagreements are usually only apparent: when properly understood all leading chemists agree about most of the most fundamental chemical principles. Where true disagreements exist, Berkeley resolves them on purely philosophical grounds.

As he develops this thesis, Peterschmitt discusses issues on which Berkeley scholars tend to focus, and in this way he emphasizes the significance of those issues to Berkeley's project in *Siris*. For example, as an immaterialist Berkeley holds that the essence of spirit is to act and the essence of physical objects is to be perceived. Yet in *Siris* Berkeley seems to countenance the existence of unobserved objects, corpuscles, and an active physical principle, fire. To reconcile this latter position with the former, Peterschmitt shows that Berkeley develops an "occasionalist" interpretation of chemistry in two steps. First, he rejects all mechanistic chemical explanations in terms of the shape and movements of corpuscles in favor of explanations in terms of specific attractive powers—a view he attributes to Newton. He then explains attractions in terms of the movements of corpuscles. Since, for Berkeley, motion is an idea and hence "visibly inactive," this interpretation allows him to conclude that the proper aim of chemistry is to display the rules or laws of nature, not to identify true causes. One can therefore speak of "active" principles but only as a natural philosopher, that is, not in metaphysical strictness.

This view may seem problematic, since we apparently have no ideas of the motions of corpuscles, but Peterschmitt argues that Berkeley's commitment to the existence of unobserved physical objects is both consistent and well-motivated. In general, unobserved phenomena pose no special challenges to immaterialism since they may be analyzed conditionally. The heliocentric hypothesis, for instance, becomes a set of propositions concerning what one would see if, for example, one were transported beyond the sphere of the earth. Claims about corpuscles can be construed in the same way, provided there are good reasons to posit the existence of corpuscles. Prior to his exposure to the works of 18<sup>th</sup> chemists like Boerhaave and Homberg, Berkeley did not think that there were such reasons, so he neither endorsed nor rejected the existence of corpuscles in his early works. The case is different, though, in the context of Berkeley's treatment of chemistry in *Siris*, since the very possibility of explanation in 18<sup>th</sup> century chemistry not only presupposes the existence of corpuscles but also provides observational evidence for their existence. In particular, Berkeley believed that Homberg's experiments on the calcination of metals showed that corpuscles have weight (an observable property), and that this is evidence that corpuscles should be considered real entities and not mere theoretical posits, even by an immaterialist.

Peterschmitt concludes that if Berkeley's philosophy evolved over the course of his career, the turning point came much earlier than *Siris*. For on his interpretation, Berkeley, far from departing from immaterialism, relies crucially on immaterialist principles in developing his philosophy of chemistry, and on the metaphilosophy and philosophy of science of *De Motu*. Berkeley's improved understanding of chemistry allowed him to demonstrate the views he had always held about the hierarchy of scientific disciplines by showing how the aims of chemistry promote the aims of philosophy and religion. In the second part of the book, "La théorie chimique selon Berkeley: chimie et apologétique," Peterschmitt characterizes Berkeley's philosophy of chemistry and establishes its role in *Siris*' apologetic. This section is perhaps the more valuable of the two since it is here that Peterschmitt illuminates the text considerably by recovering *Siris*' scientific context, a context unfamiliar to most contemporary readers.

He begins by explaining and evaluating Berkeley's efforts to unify the field of chemistry, tracking Berkeley's discussions of acids, salts, air, and fire step by step. Since Berkeley seems to effect this unification almost completely and for the first time, the central aims of the section are to determine whether Berkeley's readings of 18<sup>th</sup> century chemical treatises are accurate and whether his proposed synthesis succeeds.

For example: Berkeley argues that all prominent 18<sup>th</sup> century chemists agree that there is only one physical principle (viz., fire) that can be said to be "active" in the natural philosophical understanding of that term. Peterschmitt critically evaluates Berkeley's claims that Newton's aether and Homberg's sulphur (elements which are said to be both active and fundamental) are identical to the principle of fire. While he finds that Berkeley's readings of Newton and Homberg appear to be tortured, he grants that Berkeley was not alone in suggesting it, noting that Stephen Hales (a "respectable Newtonian") made a similar suggestion at about the same time Berkeley composed *Siris*. This is characteristic of Peterschmitt's findings. He suggests that Berkeley often misinterprets the chemical treatises at his disposal—as in his conflation of varieties of sulphur with the principle Sulphur in his reading of Homberg—and yet he remains sympathetic to Berkeley's attempt to forge a unified chemical theory. The goal is worthy, and though Peterschmitt judges it to be impossible to meet, it is not for that reason quixotic because Berkeley had legitimate hope of success.

*Siris* is philosophically interesting, then, because Berkeley's attempt to unify chemistry is serious and in some respects successful, and because Berkeley's attempt to provide his chemical theory with metaphysical underpinnings is compelling and distinctive. But *Siris* is also significant as a work of Christian apologetics. Berkeley addresses free-thinkers who believe that 18<sup>th</sup> century mechanics implies atheism by first insisting that chemistry, not mechanics, is the more fundamental branch of natural philosophy; and then he shows that this means that the interactions between physical objects, in the final analysis, must be explained in terms of specific attractive virtues that do not themselves admit of mechanical explanation. More importantly, Berkeley argues that the chemical analysis of particular physical objects and the study of chemistry in general lead to arguments for the existence of a providential God. Since tar-water is plentiful, cheap, and easy to prepare, this means that if it is a panacea, as Berkeley believes, then its creator must be beneficent and providential. Fire is the vehicle by means of which God acts in the world, so no effect is accomplished without it. It is both a pervasive and extremely powerful, volatile element, yet the world is pleasantly heated and not engulfed in flame. Thus, the study of fire, the active principle of tar-water, also puts us in mind of God's care for us and his great power. Finally, the analogy that Berkeley draws between natural and artificial chemistry (roughly speaking between what human chemists can accomplish in their laboratories and what God can accomplish through chemistry in the cosmos) helps us to appreciate how God's chemistry is vastly superior to our own, inspiring a proper awe in the face of creation.

Peterschmitt concludes that *Siris* may be profitably read together with *De Motu*—since it applies many of the philosophical claims about natural philosophy from *De Motu* to chemistry—and (as Laurent Jaffro has argued) with *Alciphron*—since its aims are

primarily apologetic and pedagogical. The reason that most readers find *Siris* to be too strange to read seriously is that they do not properly appreciate the context in which it was composed. Peterschmitt shows that against this background it reveals itself to be, among other things, a sustained, coherent, and innovative contribution to the philosophy of 18<sup>th</sup> century science. *Berkeley et la chimie* will henceforth serve as a touchstone for *Siris* scholarship and should become a key source for all general treatments of Berkeley's thought, since, with only a very few exceptions, such works give *Siris* short shrift. I have, however, a few reservations about the work, reservations which would tend, if well founded, more to highlight the need for further work on *Siris* than to undermine any of the results of Peterschmitt's research.

Early on, Peterschmitt admits that he restricts himself to a discussion of Berkeley's philosophy of science. This would seem to indicate that he intends to bracket at least some questions concerning *Siris*' broader philosophical significance. The circumscribed conclusions of the book thus seem well-supported: *Siris* is worth reading because it contributes to our understanding of 18<sup>th</sup> century philosophy of science, the evolution of the philosophy of science in general, and our understanding of Berkeley's philosophical work as a whole. However, although Peterschmitt rarely trespasses the boundaries he sets for himself, when he does, he sometimes closes off avenues of research. For example, in noting how Berkeley appeals to ancient sources throughout the *Siris* and not only in the sections on chemistry, Peterschmitt draws attention to how Berkeley does not turn away from rigorous philosophical analysis in order to luxuriate in abstruse metaphysical and alchemical speculations. Furthermore, in his effort to rehabilitate *Siris*, Peterschmitt's account obviously is intended to apply to the text as a whole—for at least three reasons. First, Berkeley had rhetorical reasons for writing the book, for his appeals seem to have the objective of cloaking contemporary chemists in a mantle of respectability. Second, Berkeley had theoretical reasons, for he sought additional confirmation for his view that fire plays a central cosmological role. Third, Berkeley appealed to the ancients as part of his apology, because he wanted to show that free-thinkers can't appeal to the ancients in their arguments for atheism.

The important point is that these appeals play only a secondary role in Berkeley's argument. This must be the case, according to Peterschmitt, since otherwise a central argument in his apologetic will be circular and for two reasons. First, it will seem that Berkeley appeals to the ancients to support the theories of the moderns and *vice versa*; and, second, it will seem that Berkeley endorses only those ancient views which happen to suit his apology. Peterschmitt seems right to identify rhetorical and theoretical reasons for Berkeley's use of the ancients, though it should be added that if he relies at all on their authority, he also takes great pains to establish it. Berkeley was convinced that many of the ancient works to which he appeals in *Siris* are rejected out of hand by his contemporaries, and he upbraids them for this.

It strikes me, however, that here Peterschmitt's contextualization is insufficient insofar as he privileges contemporary views of the aims of philosophy in judging whether Berkeley's use of the ancients is philosophical. In *Siris* Berkeley aligns himself with an outmoded and deeply syncretistic natural philosophical tradition to which Newton, as a

chemist, also belonged. Scientists like Bacon, chemists like Newton and philosophers of chemistry like Berkeley believed in the existence of a *prisca sapientia* (or as Berkeley calls it in *Siris*, *theoparadotos philosophia*), and they understood the scientific project as one of recovery not discovery (since this “pristine knowledge” was mostly lost). When Berkeley discovers ancient precedents to the cosmology of fire developed by 18<sup>th</sup> century chemists, he sees himself as confirming the chemists’ results, and I think that there is no need to worry that this procedure is circular. Just as Berkeley appeals to immaterialist principles of intelligibility to critique 18<sup>th</sup> century chemists—rejecting, for instance, any suggestion that chemical principles are truly active—so he also relies on those principles to reveal how ancient philosophers separate prejudices from the glimmerings of the divine tradition.

Just as Miles Burnyeat criticizes Berkeley’s claim that Plato and Aristotle were really immaterialists, so also Berkeley’s readings of the ancient philosophers are often as tortured as his readings of the modern chemists. But Peterschmitt minimizes this because in his account, Berkeley sees himself as criticizing both ancients and moderns according to the same standards; and because he is committed to the existence of a divine tradition, agreement with the ancients would be significant evidence of the truth of the conclusions of 18<sup>th</sup> century chemists. This criticism is minor, but it is worth registering nonetheless since, at least in this regard, Peterschmitt’s project of rehabilitation and domestication tends to obscure rather than reveal *Siris*’ intellectual context. *Siris* seems strange not only because it is developed against a scientific context that few understand, but because it is animated by philosophical concerns and commitments that few contemporary readers share.

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## Review

Keota Fields. *Berkeley: Ideas, Immaterialism, and Objective Presence*.  
Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011. xi + 241 pages.  
ISBN: 978-0-739-14295-0

In his book, *Berkeley: Ideas, Immaterialism, and Objective Presence*, Keota Fields suggests that rather than reading Berkeley's work as engaging chiefly from considerations in Descartes, Malebranche, or Locke, as is typically done, it would be fruitful to look to a different source: Arnauld. Fields' main thesis is that we ought to read Berkeley's philosophical views as emerging from Arnauld's philosophy of perception.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, he argues that, following Arnauld, Berkeley held an "act theory" of perception: a view on which ideas are identical to acts of perception, as opposed to being the objects of those acts.<sup>2</sup> This view is rooted in Arnauld's reading of Descartes' doctrine of objective presence, that is, the doctrine that ideas have objective reality in so far as their representative objects exist in the mind. As Descartes writes, "the idea of the sun is the sun itself existing in the intellect—not of course formally existing, as it does in the heavens, but objectively existing, i.e., in the way in which objects normally are in the intellect" (CSM 2: 75, cited on p. 25). In his sustained debate with Malebranche on the metaphysics of perception, Arnauld maintains—contra Malebranche's view that ideas must be entities in their own right—that there are only two kinds of beings involved in perception, namely, the mind and its purported perceptual object, and that the idea that represents that object is merely an act of perception, and not itself a being.<sup>3</sup> Although (as far as I am aware) Berkeley does not ever explicitly mention Arnauld, Fields argues that reading Berkeley as holding an Arnauldian act theory can help to explain and clarify a number of Berkeley's arguments, including arguments in the NTV, arguments against abstraction, and arguments for immaterialism.

Fields recognizes that many scholars will find his claim that Berkeley is an act theorist to be at least *prima facie* quite surprising. After all, Berkeley typically uses object language when referring to ideas; moreover, he seems quite clearly to deny that ideas are modes of minds (see PHK 49), and Fields explicitly takes Arnauld to be committed to the view that

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<sup>1</sup> In what follows, I use the following abbreviations for Berkeley's work: NTV for *New Theory of Vision*, PHK for *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, and DHP for *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*.

<sup>2</sup> Fields is not the first to suggest that Berkeley is an act theorist: see, for example, Margaret Atherton, "The Coherence of Berkeley's Theory of Mind," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 43 (1983): 389-99. He is the first, however, to develop this claim to the extent that he does.

<sup>3</sup> Fields' sustained discussion of the doctrine of objective presence as it is found in Descartes and interpreted by Arnauld can be found in his chapter 2, but elements of this discussion surface in virtually every subsequent chapter. Fields reads the doctrine of objective presence largely through J.W. Yolton [see, e.g., *Perceptual Acquaintance from Descartes to Reid* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) among numerous other places].

ideas, *qua* acts, are indeed modes of minds (5). In chapter 2, therefore, Fields deftly clears away some of these *prima facie* objections to his reading of Berkeley. He notes, for instance, that the mere use of object terminology in reference to ideas is not sufficient to deny that Berkeley holds an act theory, since Arnauld also uses such terminology when he is talking of the representative aspect of ideas (18-19). With respect to PHK 49, Fields argues that it might not be possible to read this passage straightforwardly. For one thing, in this passage Berkeley also seems to reject a substance–mode ontology, though he seems elsewhere to be committed to such an ontology. Fields also suggests that there is an ambiguity in the term “mode” that may be exploited here: sometimes modes are meant to refer to *modifications*, but there is another use of the term “mode”—one that Locke sometimes appeals to—on which powers and activities can count as modes even though they are not modifications. Fields thus argues that PHK 49 involves a rejection of ideas as modes in the first sense, but not in the second, and hence that it is compatible with Berkeley’s holding an act theory (40).

In chapters 3-5, Fields turns his attention to Berkeley’s theory of vision. Here Fields’ main argument seems to be that the reading of Berkeley as an act theorist helps to make sense of many of Berkeley’s moves: in particular, Berkeley’s rejection of the geometrical theory of vision (chapter 3), and Berkeley’s discussion of the Molyneux thought experiment (chapter 4). Both Berkeley and his opponents accepted that strictly speaking, visual perception is two-dimensional; the question for both, then, was how to explain visual distance perception. On the geometric theory, the suggestion is that distance perception involves geometric calculation. Berkeley’s primary argument against this claim seems to be that we are not aware of making such calculations, and so we must provide an alternate explanation. Here Fields points out that Arnauld’s act theory also includes the claim that ideas (*qua* acts of perception) are “reflexive,” that is, that having an idea simultaneously involves having an awareness of the having of that idea. Given the reflexivity of ideas, it is reasonable for Berkeley to conclude that if we make geometric calculations then we must be aware of making them, and conversely, that if we are not so aware, then we must not be making them. Fields further explains that whereas a Cartesian might address the worry by proposing a *a priori* geometrical knowledge (whether by means of Descartes’ innate ideas or Malebranche’s perception of the intelligible idea of extension) (80), that Berkeley’s use of the Molyneux thought experiment is meant to argue against the possibility of such a *a priori* knowledge (100).<sup>4</sup>

To my mind, the main virtue of Fields’ discussion of the theory of vision is his work explaining the background to Berkeley’s NTV. In chapter 3 in particular, Fields engages in a very nice discussion of the Cartesian theory of sensory perception, and how that

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<sup>4</sup> Although Berkeley certainly rejected innate geometrical ideas (as well as the vision in God thesis), and although I agree with Fields that his answer to the Molyneux thought experiment is tied up with this rejection, nonetheless I worry a bit about Fields’ contention that Berkeley rejected a *a priori* geometrical knowledge. The objects of geometrical proofs must certainly be acquired via experience—geometry, after all, is the science of tangible space, for Berkeley—but this is not to say that those proofs themselves rely on experience, and hence that our geometrical knowledge is itself acquired via experience. I am not at all sure that Fields can—or indeed, wants to—make the latter point, but it is part of what is implicated in his claim that Berkeley rejects a *a priori* geometrical knowledge.

theory is further developed by Arnauld and Malebranche. I am not wholly convinced by Fields' claim that Berkeley's arguments in the NTV are due to his being an act theorist. Fields is certainly right to point out that Berkeley must be committed to the claim that we are aware (or at least, can be aware) of all of our ideas, and that his being an act theorist would explain this commitment. But of course this is not to say that it is only Berkeley's being an act theorist that would explain it. Nonetheless, Fields has done us a true service in providing a fleshed out Cartesian background to Berkeley's work in NTV.

In chapter 6, Fields considers Berkeley's attack on abstraction. Much of the secondary literature on this attack centers around two questions: (i) whether Berkeley is successful in his attacks or—on the assumption that his primary target is Locke—whether he has misconstrued Locke's doctrine of abstraction, and (ii) what precisely the structure of the attacks might be. By reading Berkeley (and also Locke) through Arnauld, Fields provides a response to (ii) while also arguing, with respect to (i), that Berkeley's arguments might indeed hit their mark. Here Fields focuses on both the doctrine of objective presence and also on the causal "ex nihilo" principle that we are familiar with from Descartes' third Meditation, that there must be at least as much reality in the cause of an idea as there is in the idea. Fields notes that this principle constrains the objective reality of an idea, and in particular, that it constrains the objective reality of abstract ideas: they must not contain any more objective reality than the ideas from which they are abstracted.<sup>5</sup> Fields further argues that Lockean abstract ideas violate the *ex nihilo* principle (131-132, 141): "there can be no causal explanation of the content of abstract ideas" (143).<sup>6</sup>

I admit that I am not quite sure what Fields has in mind here. I think he is quite right to point out that the *ex nihilo* principle constrains the content of abstract ideas, in that that content certainly cannot go *beyond* the content of the ideas from which they are derived. But even if Locke is committed to abstraction that involves separation as opposed to mere selective attention—as Fields argues he is (142-143)—still I cannot see why such separation would violate the *ex nihilo* principle: the content of separated abstract ideas would surely be more *impoverished* than the content of the ideas from which they are derived, and so would not contain *more* objective reality. I wonder also whether this account can adequately explain why Berkeley focuses not only on the partiality of ideas but also on their indeterminacy. Lastly, I wonder whether Fields thinks that the Malebranchean idea of intelligible extension is among Berkeley's targets. Given that our perception of this idea is caused by God, it seems to me that this idea would certainly not violate the *ex nihilo* principle. Berkeley argues that Malebranche "builds on the most

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<sup>5</sup> And those ideas, in turn, must not contain any more objective reality than the formal reality of their causes. Fields leans on this principle to explain Berkeley's attack on Locke's inconsistent abstract idea of a triangle, and ties this together with the interpretation of Berkeley as relying on the principle that impossibility implies inconceivability [see, e.g., Kenneth P. Winkler, *Berkeley: an Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).] The inconsistent triangle is impossible and hence it has no formal reality. It thus cannot (given the *ex nihilo* principle) cause in us an abstract idea with any amount of objective reality. This explains why impossibility implies inconceivability (140).

<sup>6</sup> And since Fields also reads Locke as being committed to an Arnauldian act theory, and that Locke's account of abstraction mirrors Arnauld's account (128), he thinks that this criticism is apt.



abstract general ideas, which I entirely disclaim” (DHP 214); it is worth considering whether Fields’ reconstruction of Berkeley’s anti-abstractionism can explain this claim.

Chapter 7 is the longest of the chapters. Here Fields looks at the arguments for immaterialism. He produces what he calls a “transcendental” argument for realism on Locke’s behalf, which he links quite closely with Descartes’ argument for the existence of the external world and hence with the *ex nihilo* causal principle. Fields sees Berkeley’s immaterialist argument as having this transcendental argument as its primary target. But what Berkeley scholars might find of greater note here is that Fields produces a new reading of PHK 4 in light of his claim that Berkeley is committed to an act theory. In PHK 4, Berkeley writes that “all sensible objects . . . [are] things we perceive by sense,” but also that what we perceive are ideas that depend on minds for their existence. As Fields points out, commentators often read this as a transitive argument for immaterialism: since sensible objects are perceived by sense, and since what is perceived by sense are mind-dependent ideas, then sensible objects are just (collections of) mind-dependent ideas. But Fields argues that reading Berkeley through the lens of Arnauld helps to show that what Berkeley really has in mind here is just the doctrine of objective presence: it is not that Berkeley is identifying sensible objects with ideas; instead, he is claiming that ideas are those sensible objects as they exist in our minds. “When Berkeley asks what are houses, mountains, and trees but what we perceive by sense, and what do we perceive by sense other than our own ideas, he makes a claim quite similar to Descartes’ claim that the idea of the sun is the sun itself existing in the mind, or Arnauld’s similar claim” (180). This then leads him to reread the likeness principle as also being motivated by the doctrine of objective presence and the *ex nihilo* principle (187-88). Whether or not one accepts Fields’ reasoning here, this is a truly original contribution to the debate surrounding the likeness principle, and as such deserves our attention.

Fields’ book should be embraced by Berkeley scholars as presenting a largely novel and tremendously rich reading of Berkeley in light of his philosophical predecessors. There are certainly some parts of the book that I might have liked to see expanded or clarified. I was surprised to note, for instance, that Fields has relatively little to say about the pain analogy in DHP, though that analogy is often taken to support reading Berkeley as an act theorist. I also thought he might have spent more time discussing PHK 5, in which Berkeley seems to claim that one cannot—at pains of engaging in illegitimate abstraction—separate ideas from acts of perception. Moreover, Fields’ focus is often on showing how reading Berkeley as an act theorist can explain certain elements of his view, but he does not always spend much time considering alternate explanations. Arguments stemming from phenomenological/introspective considerations might do at least as good a job in some cases, for example, in explaining some of Berkeley’s views about distance perception, or in explaining why Berkeley objects to the indeterminacy of some abstract ideas. Plus, Fields largely glosses over such explanations in favor of causal explanations, which fits in with his focus on objective presence. He explains that “early modern theories of ideas . . . sought causal explanations for ideas” (112).

Now, there is something *prima facie* a bit curious about this focus on causal explanations within the Berkeleian context specifically. Arnauld and Malebranche's quarrel about the doctrine of objective presence is over whether we perceive objects by means of ideas that are representative beings, or whether those ideas are just acts by which we immediately perceive the objects. This certainly makes sense within the Cartesian realist context, in which—generally speaking—our ideas represent a mind-independent world. Until the reader gets to chapter 7, however, she is left wondering just exactly how this is supposed to transfer to a Berkeleian idealist context, in which there is no such mind-independent world, but our sensible ideas are caused by God.

Given this context, prior to chapter 7, some of the arguments that Fields attributes to Berkeley *qua* follower of Arnauld seem a bit misplaced. As an example, Fields notes that Malebranche's argument against our visually perceiving things at a distance relies on the rejection of action at a distance (70). He then suggests that Berkeley appeals to just this sort of argument to motivate the epistemic superiority of tactile sensations over visual ones, which superiority then figures into his discussion of the Molyneux experiment: "there is an epistemic asymmetry between objects of sight and touch for both Locke and Berkeley . . . ideas of touch are directly caused by the objects they represent because those objects come into direct local contact with somatic organs. . . . But distance is mediately perceived by sight because objects at a distance do not come into local contact with the eyes" (103). There is something strange about attributing to Berkeley an argument that relies on whether or not objects come into contact with our sense organs.

Now in chapter 7, Fields does provide some explanation as to how to transfer the doctrine of objective presence into the immaterialist context: he suggests that the objects of our idea are divine ideas, and further, that perhaps we can make sense of the differing content of our ideas by reference to differing degrees of reality in divine ideas (178). I would have liked to see Fields explore this suggestion quite a bit more than he does. I would have been particularly interested in a possible rereading of Berkeley's cryptic remarks on divine archetypes, and his argument against divine suffering, in light of this suggestion. But perhaps more importantly, I am not quite sure how to read this claim back into (for example) the explanation for epistemic asymmetry. Some guidance from Fields might be helpful here. All this said, however, Fields' book presents a wonderful contribution to Berkeley scholarship, at least in so far as it opens up a number of new and interesting questions for readers of Berkeley to explore.

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## Review

W. J. McCormack. *'We Irish' in Europe: Yeats, Berkeley, and Joseph Hone*.  
 Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2010. x + 211 pp.  
 ISBN: 978-1-906-35943-0

This is a book of wide ambitions. Its first aim is to show that W. B. Yeats held a specific view of George Berkeley, a view mediated by Joseph Hone and Mario Manlio Rossi. Hone (and Rossi) overemphasize the readings of Berkeley by Gentile and other right-wing commentators in their mediation of the early twentieth-century Italian reception of Berkeley back in Ireland. This mediated Berkeley, McCormack contends, was a subjective idealist whose work was of use in forming an idealist ethics of sacrifice to the State. McCormack is opposed to the political outlook expressed in this version of Berkeley. The second aim of his book is to suggest that a refusal to confront Yeats's interest in fascism has resulted in an episode of lapsed knowledge in Irish literary studies, in which the complicity of literary nationalism with a theory of the State based on sacrifice (and—in a rather audacious leap—therefore also with fascism) is alleged. This second aim is only partially related to Berkeley, so will not be extensively treated in this review.

McCormack contends, then, that Hone was an intermediary for and proponent of a certain interpretation of Berkeley. The book's provocation is "that Berkeley is reconceived, misbegotten and generally deformed in the 'mind' of Italian idealism swaddled by fascism" (8-9). McCormack approaches Berkeley as a proponent of subjective idealism, at least in the works of the heroic period (34). Idealism is the context in which Giovanni Gentile writes on Berkeley, and also the context in which Gentile works to integrate his ethical philosophy with his politics: "Gentile's grand concept of the State as actualist perceptual creation may be the canonical authority to be recognized by well-informed *fascisti*. But the particular emphasis on interiority parallels what its author traced in the development of Berkeley's philosophy, with mind as the location of the real and as the prerequisite of a morality for the state" (75). This Italian reading of Berkeley is what associates him with early twentieth-century right-wing nationalism in Yeats's mind (64). Joseph Hone's writings,<sup>1</sup> and more significantly, his friendship with Yeats, are the main conduits for this vision of Berkeley reaching the poet.

McCormack is keen to emphasize how prone Yeats may have been to proto-fascistic interpretations of a philosopher who could be claimed for the Irish nation. Evidence is cited that Yeats received a literary prize in Frankfurt after the accession of the National Socialists, that he met the German ambassador in Dublin, and endorsed the Nuremberg laws (23, and then partially or wholly repeated 43, 47, 50). Yeats is, more or less, scolded for being a right-wing nationalist (83). Hone's not mentioning the translation by Giovanni Amendola of the *New Theory of Vision* is taken as part of a concerted strategy

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<sup>1</sup> Particularly "Berkeley in Italy," *New Statesman* 27 (2 October 1926), 593-602; and "Bishop Berkeley, Ireland's great philosopher, his fame in Italy," *Irish Times*, 10 March 1928.

of occluding the liberal or centrist reception of Berkeley in Italy in the first decades of the twentieth century (84). And McCormack seems willing to defend the idea that Yeats could not have developed the ideology he is alleged to hold (with sacrifice for the nation at its center) without having had access to the proto-fascistic appropriation of Berkeley that is sketched in this book. This contention, like others in the book—for example, that it might have been the Jewishness of Adorno, Benjamin, Berlin and Husserl that prevented Yeats from taking an active interest in them, 49-50—is of a highly conjectural kind.

The book explicitly defers to another occasion various matters that one would have thought central to a study of Yeats, Hone and Berkeley: “The manner in which the bishop’s thought influenced Yeats’s later poetry awaits further investigation” (32); “That Hone shared title-page honors with the Italian philosopher Mario Rossi is a bibliographical teaser to be resolved on another occasion” (63). There are likewise some assertions about what is or is not the case in Berkeley’s *oeuvre*, or in Berkeley studies, with which readers may take issue. It is said to be urgent that Berkeley’s thought is put in its context (151). Berman’s *Berkeley and Irish Philosophy* is cited several times, and so McCormack must be aware of at least some attempts to contextualize Berkeley’s philosophy. There is, however, a much wider literature that might have been addressed on this subject. The assertion that “Berkeley’s writings (well-styled in themselves) gave no hint of a theory of literature or culture. . . . Indeed, Berkeley is scarcely concerned with notions of the past, ancient or recent” (27), seems highly questionable. After all, the Italian journals, *Querist*, *Alciphron*, and *Siris* demonstrate great interest in culture and the ancient past.

Perhaps the most worrying assertion is that it is an obscure question whether Berkeley had an ethical theory (165). If sustained consideration of the bases for determining an individual’s course of action in relation to other people passes as an ethical theory, Berkeley of course has one, and it has been the subject of more than one book. When raising this “obscure” question, McCormack just mentions *Passive Obedience* (156), one text in which Berkeley considers ethical matters. But McCormack does not cite or write about *Passive Obedience* beyond briefly noting that Yeats wanted to see its politics as high Tory or Jacobite (35), even though one of his subjects is the interest early twentieth-century writers took in Berkeley’s politics (28-29). McCormack does not state what he believes Berkeley’s politics to be. There was surely an opportunity to discuss the categorical rejection of rebellion in *Passive Obedience* (W 6: 28), and the ways in which an early twentieth-century Irish nationalist, just as an early eighteenth-century Jacobite, might have seized on the recognition, in the final stages of Berkeley’s text, that there are occasions on which the seat of supreme power is not clear and that people must be allowed to follow their conscience in those cases (W 6: 45-46). The tension between condemnation of rebellion, endorsement of the disciplinary power of the State, and this closing hint of exceptional circumstances would have been a very productive textual basis on which McCormack could have developed his case.

But there is little substantial engagement with Berkeley’s texts at all in this book. No attention is paid to the *Maxims on Patriotism*, nor the remarks on patriotism in *Alciphron*. Crito and Alciphron dispute the correct manner in which to be philo-Hellenic. Alciphron

promotes the Greeks as pagans; Crito responds that the Greeks and other nations who have “made the greatest figure in the world” do so on account of “a peculiar reverence for their respective laws and institutions, which inspired them with steadiness and courage, and that hearty generous love of their country, by which they did not merely understand a certain language or tribe of men, much less a particular spot of earth, but included a certain system of manners, customs, notions, rites, and laws civil and religious” (W 3: 193). Here is a patriotism that does not lend itself very easily to proto-fascistic political philosophies, amounting to a rational preference for a particular mode of life rather than a sentimental preference for an indefinite idea of cultural distinctiveness. To make any convincing connection between Berkeley and Irish literary and more broadly cultural nationalism (the second, and perhaps just as controversial, concern of Mc Cormack’s study) would have required this more direct textual analysis. The later chapters of the book reconsider some major texts of twentieth-century Irish literature with an eye to the occluded history of Yeats’s interest in fascism, with its (pseudo?) Berkeleian element. But, without an explicit basis in Berkeley’s texts and their mediation through Gentile and Hone, it is hard to derive much of a contribution to a reception history of Berkeley’s writings from this book.

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## Montréal Conference Summaries

Stephen H. Daniel and Sébastien Charles

In June scholars from throughout Europe and North America met at the Université de Sherbrooke, Campus Longueuil Québec (near Montréal) to commemorate the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of Berkeley's *Passive Obedience* (1712). The conference on Berkeley's moral and social philosophy was organized by Bertil Belfrage and Sébastien Charles and was sponsored by the Université de Sherbrooke and the International Berkeley Society (IBS), with major funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

At the end of the three-day meeting Stephen Daniel, president of the IBS, was asked to summarize a few of the points that emerged from the discussions of the English-language papers, and Sébastien Charles was asked to do the same for the French-language papers. Here are their comments:

Berkeley initially assumed that all discourse (including discourse about ethics) could be expressed in terms that were cognitively available. According to Bertil Belfrage, Berkeley believed that claims about goodness could be expressed in terms of the general well-being of all humanity. But he also came to believe that other moral claims could only be expressed non-cognitively—that is, as indicating how some claims recommend that we do certain things without providing a justification for why we should. In this sense, some moral claims are at best based on mysteries.

The effort to provide a cognitively-accessible basis for morality appears in accounts by commentators who describe the rationale for morality in terms of rule utilitarianism (Heta Gylling) and pragmatic consequentialism (Richard Van Iten). Marc Hight adds that the discussion of morality (especially moral decay) can also be framed in terms of productivity, even when economic structures are not obviously linked to God's activity. But as Ville Paukkonen, Marta Szymańska-Lewoszewska, and Daniel Flage point out (respectively), perfecting human nature, fulfilling our naturally sociable appetites, and acting in accord with natural law, all reveal that moral properties are (as Ville puts it) "mixed" with natural properties. The problem with these approaches is that the more they are understood as naturalistic, the less capable they are of providing a distinctly *moral* foundation for behavior.

Scott Breuninger avoids the naturalistic problem entirely by replacing the philosophical fascination with theoretical morality with a description of how virtue is experienced as what actually improves citizens' lives. Adam Grzelinski addresses the problem in a glancing way by suggesting that Berkeley's understanding of beauty as disinterestedness opens up a way to think of moral sensibility apart from the emotional features that threaten morality's rationality and universality. Nancy Kendrick extends this by noting how, in Berkeley's inclusion of Native Americans and women in the harmonious project of fulfilling God's plan for humanity, education is important for moral improvement. But Milowit Kuninski faces the

problem head on, arguing that God's involvement in the creation of conscience and the impulse to sociability reveals how Christianity extends aspects of Stoicism. Artem Besedin challenges this strategy by bringing the different ways to think about laws of nature closer together.

As Timo Airaksinen and Artem note, though, by introducing God into the picture, Berkeley threatens the prospect of moral responsibility by raising doubts about human freedom. Hugh Hunter and Melissa Frankel argue that such doubts are ultimately unwarranted because our volitions are, in fact, effective (and the bases for moral responsibility) to the extent that they are understood in terms of God's laws. And in redefining what conscience and the will are for Berkeley, I challenge not only the radical individualism to which utilitarianism is intended as a response but also the volition–action distinction that generates the concurrence-occasionalism debate.

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Tolérance, philosophie naturelle, réforme de la conscience, *paideia*, rôle de la coutume, voilà quelques-uns des thèmes abordés lors de ce colloque par les présentations faites en français, et le moins que l'on puisse dire est que, à première vue, elles balisent des champs de la philosophie morale et politique relativement hétérogènes. Mais accepter un tel constat risquerait fort de miner le discours berkeleyen lui-même, et de le présenter comme incohérent, ce qui serait quelque peu problématique car il semble bien, malgré tout, qu'une certaine unité de pensée soit à l'œuvre et s'y manifeste pour tout ce qui touche aux questions sociales et politiques. Or, à prendre les choses à partir d'une autre perspective, méthode berkeleyenne s'il en est, il me semble malgré tout que les interventions faites en français durant ce colloque ont quelque chose de commun à nous dire sur la pensée morale et sociale de Berkeley, qui, me semble-t-il, touche à l'idée de réforme, qui semble de prime abord peu compatible avec l'idée d'une obéissance passive prime stricto sensu, qui consisterait à se contenter de suivre l'ordre établi sans chercher à le modifier ou à le remettre en question.

Or, à cet égard, au niveau politique du moins, la reprise berkeleyenne de l'idée de tolérance pose problème, puisqu'il s'agit toujours de tolérer ce qui paraît diverger d'avec l'opinion commune. Comme je crois l'avoir montré dans mon propre texte, si l'on s'avise de distinguer la tolérance religieuse de la tolérance politique, la question de la conscience errante de celle de l'obligation de se conformer aux lois du pays dans lequel on vit, alors Berkeley apparaît relativement proche des thèses défendues à son époque, reconnaissant le droit pour la conscience individuelle de se tromper en matière religieuse, la religion n'étant pas, on le sait, affaire de démonstration, et s'opposant à l'usage de la contrainte en matière de foi. Le respect de la liberté de penser en ce domaine apparaît bien inconditionnel, ce qui n'interdit bien sûr pas l'existence de limites à la tolérance des discours, si ceux-ci ont pour visée expresse la ruine du régime établi qui a légitimement le droit de se protéger. Au niveau politique,

la tolérance n'est donc pas du même ordre, et la liberté de conscience ne saurait être invoquée impunément quand elle donne lieu à une possible remise en question de l'ordre public. D'où la nécessité de préserver à tout prix l'ordre établi, non pas, ou pas seulement, au nom de sa prétendue vérité, mais au nom de son utilité. Le réformisme de Berkeley me semble s'inscrire dans une telle perspective pragmatique, où l'essentiel consiste à montrer l'utilité de la religion chrétienne pour l'ordre établi, que ce soit au niveau de ses conséquences politiques (en sacralisant le pouvoir royal, elle permet d'éviter l'anarchie qui mine les régimes démocratiques, plus instables par nature), sociales (en insistant sur les valeurs chrétiennes qui contribuent au bien commun) ou économiques (en critiquant le discours mandevillien fondé sur l'intérêt personnel).

L'idée de réforme constitue aussi le cœur de l'intervention d'Ahmed Mellah, qui visait à montrer que le combat contre la libre pensée en marche, qui représente en grande partie l'esprit des Lumières, vise tout à la fois une réforme de la conscience individuelle et de la conscience collective, au moment même où s'impose l'idée de résistance au pouvoir en place à laquelle Berkeley n'accorde que peu d'importance. Dans la lignée de Filmer plutôt que de Locke—d'ailleurs, l'idée même d'état de nature n'a pas de sens pour Berkeley et l'expression est rarissime chez lui—il s'agit de penser analogiquement l'autorité divine sur le monde des objets avec l'autorité politique sur le monde des sujets, et la royauté paraît en ce domaine l'emporter, comme si la théocratie restait malgré tout un idéal régulateur dans un XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle de plus en plus préoccupée par la question démocratique.

Réforme encore et toujours quand il s'agit de lutter contre la libre pensée, mais du côté des sciences cette fois. Comme l'a bien montré Luc Peterschmitt, la réforme de la philosophie naturelle prend une place de plus en plus importante dans l'évolution de la pensée de Berkeley. Considérée comme peu utile pour rendre manifeste l'existence de Dieu, qui peut être appréhendée sans sa médiation, la philosophie naturelle constitue aussi un obstacle à la compréhension de l'action divine puisqu'elle se soucie avant tout du détail au lieu de considérer l'ensemble du donné. Bref, dans un tel cadre, la pratique n'a pas à s'accorder avec une connaissance théorique quelconque, et elle se suffit à elle-même. Seulement, dans la *Siris*, la position de Berkeley est autre, et une vraie réforme est envisagée, celle de l'utilisation faite par le libre penseur de la philosophie naturelle, et de la chimie en particulier, pour le conduire à comprendre qu'il s'agit d'une science et non d'une philosophie, lui en montrer les limites, qui sont celles des corps, et lui en faire comprendre la valeur pratique, qui est de montrer que la nature est un discours qui doit nous conduire à celui qui le parle. Dans ce cas, la vraie réforme des sciences consisterait à soumettre les sciences physiques à la métaphysique qui seule leur donne leur véritable finalité.

Cet objectif s'inscrit évidemment dans une visée pratique plus générale, qui est celle de savoir comment réformer l'éducation, c'est-à-dire comment inculquer des préjugés utiles dans l'esprit des enfants pour qu'ils soient conduits par la suite à agir du mieux possible. Mais le rôle de l'éducateur ne peut en rester là. Travaillant la notion de générosité en contexte berkeleyen, Pascal Taranto montre qu'elle signifie avant tout



une “conscience élargie du monde,” où un autre nom pour la sagesse. Où l’on voit qu’il faut distinguer trois publics différents à éduquer, ou rééduquer parfois, à savoir le philosophe-théologien, la multitude et les libres penseurs. Pour la multitude, de bons préjugés inculqués tôt en l’âme suffiront. Mais pour les *minute philosophers*, qui n’en restent pas moins des *philosophers*, et qui doivent donc être traités comme tels, il s’agit d’élargir leur esprit par des exercices d’étirement intellectuels et spirituels, comme l’indiquait déjà Platon, et d’en venir, avec les stoïciens, à se considérer les choses du point de vue de l’universel plutôt que de notre point de vue particulier.

Cette importance de l’éducation a également été bien soulignée par Jérémy Girard, qui l’a mis en relation avec la coutume, mais avec une coutume pensée sous une forme la plus raisonnable possible, l’idée de Berkeley étant que la religion chrétienne permet de rationaliser en partie le donné coutumier et de le travailler de l’intérieur en donnant par exemple une valeur morale et esthétique à l’idée de bien, et que ce travail s’actualise ensuite par le biais de l’éducation. Reste malgré tout à penser le rôle de la coutume, qui ne semble guère conforme à l’idéal de réforme évoqué comme thématique reliant les précédentes interventions. Or, la coutume est une norme sociale, et donc historique, qui n’interdit pas les modifications, si ces modifications ont, comme le pense Berkeley, pour effet de produire plus de rationalité au niveau des comportements humains. Ainsi les coutumes produites par la religion anglicane valent-elles mieux que celles produites par la religion catholique, qui valent mieux que celles produites par le paganisme antique, le christianisme ayant eu, à ses yeux, valeur civilisatrice. Mais qu’en irait-il de nouvelles coutumes qui ne seraient fondées sur aucun principe religieux, telles celles que les libres penseurs souhaitent instaurer, en jugeant que la morale peut à elle seule suffire à garantir l’ordre humain? On se doute que Berkeley décerne là la déraison à l’œuvre, d’où son conseil aux libres penseurs d’aller établir leur société nouvelle dans le royaume de Monomotapa, en Afrique australe, plutôt que de le tenter en Angleterre, et de causer ainsi la ruine morale et sociale des coutumes raisonnables mises en place par le christianisme.

Alors, Berkeley réformiste? Si réformer, c’est transformer le social pour le faire correspondre à l’idéal moral et politique que l’on vise, alors Berkeley apparaît bien comme un réformiste. Seulement, les libres penseurs se présentent eux aussi comme des réformateurs, et comme les seuls véritables réformateurs puisque réformer, pour eux, c’est détruire pour rebâtir. Le message de Berkeley semble bien être de nous dire que, parfois, réformer c’est conserver, et qu’il peut y avoir une valeur au conservatisme, message sans doute inaudible puisque la modernité qui se met alors en place se présente avant tout comme tournée vers l’avenir et non plus vers le passé. En ce sens, les réflexions berkeleyennes en morale et en politique semblent bien être des “considérations intempestives,” pour reprendre une expression nietzschéenne.

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## News and Announcements

### **American Philosophical Association Eastern Division Meeting**

International Berkeley Society Session  
Marriott Marquis, Atlanta, Georgia

Friday, 28 December 2012, 5:15-7:15 p.m.

Keota Fields (Massachusetts, Dartmouth): "Berkeley's Master Argument Revisited"  
John Grey (Boston U): "Representation and Intentionality in Berkeley's Master Argument"

### **American Philosophical Association Central Division Meeting**

International Berkeley Society Session  
Hilton Riverfront, New Orleans, Louisiana

Thursday, 21 February 2013

9:00-12:00 International Berkeley Society Session: Authors Reply to Critics

John R. Roberts (Florida State): "Berkeley's Mental Realism"

Marc Hight (Hampden-Sydney): "Why Ideas Have an Ontological (and Not Merely Epistemic) Status"

Stephen H. Daniel (Texas A&M): "How Berkeley Redefines Substance"

Keota Fields (Massachusetts, Dartmouth): "Berkeley's Metaphysics of Perception"

Scott C. Breuninger (South Dakota): "Berkeley and the Irish Enlightenment: How 'Irish' Are 'We Irish'?"

Friday, 22 February 2013

6:00-7:00 p.m. Presidential Address

Margaret Atherton (Wisconsin, Milwaukee): "Dr Johnson Kicks the Stone, or Can the Immaterialisms of Berkeley's *Principles* and *Three Dialogues* Be Reconciled?"

### **International Berkeley Conference**

The 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Publication of  
*Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*  
Collegium Maius, Jagiellonian University  
Kraków, Poland  
19-22 August 2013

Scholars from around the world will be meeting to discuss Berkeley's *Three Dialogues*. Scheduled participants include Bertil Belfrage, Martha Brandt Bolton, Wolfgang Breidert, Richard Brook, Stephen Daniel, Georges Dicker, Mykolas Drunga, Keota Fields, Daniel Flage, Adam Grzelinski, James Hill, Roomet Jakapi, Milowit Kuninski, Charles McCracken, George Pappas, Ville Paukkonen, Kenneth L. Pearce, Arnaud Pelletier, Luc Peterschmitt, Katia Saporiti, Przemysław Spryszak, Tom Stoneham, Piotr Szalek, Marta Szymańska-Lewoszewska, Anna Tomaszewska, and Bartosz Zukowski.

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